CHAPTER 3

THE ROLE OF LIFE ORIENTATION EDUCATORS IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF LIFE ORIENTATION

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Life Orientation in the senior phase is primarily customized according to the needs and concerns of learners (Department of Education undated:15). In order to identify the needs for training Life Orientation educators, it is important to analyse their skills for effective facilitation of the learning area and their knowledge of an adolescent.

In section 3.2 the concept Senior Phase learner will be defined. In section 3.3 the developmental patterns of a senior phase learner will be explained. In section 3.4 the problems facing the senior phase learner will be explored and section 2.5 the role of the Life Orientation educator and the skills needed in assisting the learners will be explored.

3.2   THE SENIOR PHASE LEARNER

For the purpose of this research the Senior Phase learner includes all those learners from grade 7 to grade 9 of the General Education and Training Band which is the last phase of the General and Training Certificate (Department of education 1997a:3). Learners in this phase are normally between the ages eleven and 15 years, although in the South African context there are often older learners within the school system. They are in the developmental stage commonly known as adolescence. Behr, Cherian, Mwamwenda, Ndaba and Ramphal (1990:21) describe adolescence as to ripen or to grow into maturity.

Van der Spuy (1992:17) refers to adolescence as a process of achieving attitudes and beliefs needed for effective participation in the society. Adolescence may be seen as having originated within the tradition of developmental psychology as it suggests that adolescents are at a particular stage of development. It also implies that a set of characteristics may be found at this stage.

The awakening of a critical consciousness of the adolescent necessitates Life Orientation in developing learners' discriminatory abilities concerning value systems, morals, ethics and personal decisions (Department of Education 2001:7). Learners in this phase are expected increasingly to be able to reason independently concerning concrete material and experience. They are able to engage in open arguments and willing to accept multiple solutions to a problem. The learners need to expand their deductive and inductive reasoning by means of formal cognitive operations.

The adolescent today faces greater risks to their current and future health than ever before (Wolman 1998:4). The rapidly changing society with its demands create a more driven and ambitious generation of adolescents who grow up much faster and hence experience higher stress levels at an early age. The increased stress level influenced by the need to perform is pronounced (Dockrat 1999:36). The dangers of substance abuse are present in such a demanding and highly stressful environment. The challenge of adolescents is their ability to deal with a period of storm and stress. The challenge is also extended to Life Orientation educators as to how they can assist adolescents in dealing with their developmental tasks due to the related storm and stress.

In order to facilitate discussion and understand adolescent development, adolescent development will be discussed briefly. The following four major perspectives will be considered: physical, intellectual, emotional and social development.

3.3   ADOLESCENT DEVELOPMENT

During the adolescent stage, learners experience the greatest and most rapid bodily changes (Romano & Georgiady 1994:17). Teachers need to understand what happens to the individual during adolescence stage. *Figure 3.1* shows the development of the adolescent and the influence of the different dimensions of development.

Figure 3.1: Developmental patterns of the adolescent
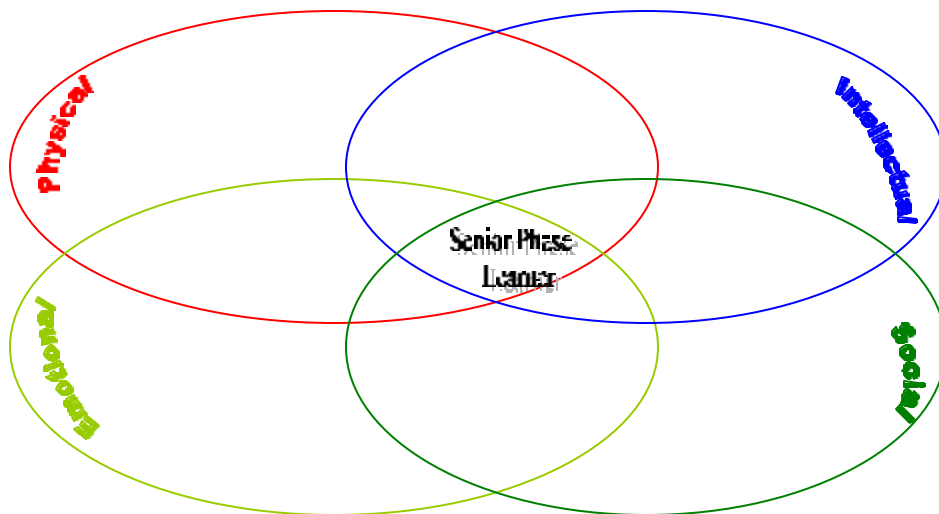
3.3.1   Physical development

Physical development is marked by several body changes in the life of an adolescent. George, Lawrence and Bushnell (1998:28) state that bodily changes that occur at puberty are more dramatic than at any stage except foetal development. Even though the changes are rapid in babies, they do not fascinate them as adolescents do. The occurrence of puberty is a distinct feature of adolescent development. Puberty is the period of transition from reproductive

immaturity (i.e. non-fertility) to productive maturity (i.e. fertility) (Jaffe 1998:74). Puberty is not a point in time; rather it is a process whereby the body changes from that of a child to that of an adult. Adolescents become aware of themselves as human beings.

Adolescents constantly think of their physical self and some of the physical changes that they undergo during puberty include oily skin, maturity of sex organs, hair and other internal changes and more active sebaceous glands (George et al 1998:28). All these changes interfere with a learners' performance. It requires of an educator to be conscious about the developmental changes and understand how to handle them.

3.3.1.1   Pubertal development

It is characterised by a large increase in hormone levels and the appearance of secondary sexual characteristics (George et al 1998:32). Hormonal fluctuations at this stage make adolescents experience mood swings. They tend to be uncontrollable at some stage and do things that are unacceptable. Personal development becomes an issue of concern. They are concerned about their weight, skin, hair and blemishes which can be an overriding problem in their mind. They bring mirrors to school; they continuously clean their shoes for they always think that someone is staring at them. The exaggerated levels of self-conscious are precipitated by awareness of changes in one's own physical growth and of changes in others as well as by preoccupation with these differences among peers (Messick & Reynolds 1992:45). All these changes are overwhelming to them and it is therefore vital for educators to share these experiences with them.

(i)   Pubertal changes in boys

Boys during this stage develop heavy muscles, their voices become heavier and they grow hair under the armpits (Messick & Reynolds 1992:45). They experience a lot of energy and their muscle structure allows them to perform heavier tasks. Lack of suitable demanding activities in their lives leads them to become involved in aggressive, and rough play and bullying (Vernon

& Al-Mabuk 1995:101). Educators who take note of these physical changes can involve learners in more challenging exercises so that their energy can be channelled more constructively.

(ii)   Pubertal changes in girls

Girls develop at a faster rate than boys (Vernon & Al-Mabuk 1995:102). They start to menstruate and if they cannot receive proper guidance, they become easily influenced by the myths surrounding menstruation. The task of the educator is to make them aware of their responsibility for sexual behaviour which is based on feelings that have developed. Topics such as pregnancy, sexual relations and sexually transmitted diseases need to be addressed.

3.3.1.2   Implications for the learner

The physical changes that learners experience during this phase do not only affect how societies view them but it also affects their inner self-evaluation. Adolescent girls are too preoccupied with their physical appearance and are sensitive to the comments of others. The adolescent girl, who is plump, may become obsessed by her appearance if she has learned the social importance of slimness from the media. Her obsession might affect her progress and even the people around her.

Physical development allows adolescents to reach peak performance in several motor activities. One thinks of athletes who have become internationally renowned in their teens. This can lead to high social and economic status for adolescents. The opposite holds true for adolescents who have diminished physical strength. This can affect them adversely. Physical strength and athletic ability have considerable social significance among boys. The social acceptability increases with greater physical powers or attractiveness. Those who are physically more attractive receive more attention (Jaffe 1998:102). The approach to life will be more positive and they will be more   venturesome in their relationships with others. The Life Orientation educator can assist the adolescent child with the following:

Support learners with low self-esteem as the adolescent's physical ability has an important bearing on his other approach to life.

Offer help with issues of menstruation and mood swings due to hormonal changes.

Give information about acne and skin problems that can cause stress and undue worry to them.

Offer emotional support to those adolescents who do not get the support from their parents, family and friends.

3.3.2   Intellectual development

According to many researchers this is the most dramatic change in thinking that occurs in the life of an adolescent (George et al 1998:52). They also maintain that the early adolescent ages are watershed years during which young people are forming lifelong dispositions on how to use or try using mental capacity. Adolescents begin to see and think about the ambiguity of things. They begin to think and debate issues because they recognise that some aspects cannot be quantified or measured (Vernon & Al-Mabuk 1995:104). Wiles and Bondi (1993:33) state that middle school learners are curious and exhibit a strong willingness to learn things they consider to be useful.

Strom, Bernard and Strom (1989:83) believe that intellectual development depends on what happened previously and what happens today influences their future. Intelligence is not fixed at birth or any another stage. The thinking ability of a child is influenced by the past experiences especially by those experiences that come under the influence of significant people in a child's life. As the young person's development proceeds, he or she is able to deal with more and more stimulation and information and is likely to seek out as many new experiences as possible to help him or her structure and make more meaningful his or her understanding both of the world around him or her and of himself or herself (Siann & Ugwuegbu 1980:127).

Jean Piaget is the best known proponent of age stages of development (Romano & Georgiady 1994:19). Strom et al (1998:89) outlined the following developmental stages that are experienced by individuals in their intellectual development:

(0 – 2 years) Sensory-motor   - Infancy

(2 – 6 years) Preoperational - Early childhood

(6 – 11years) Concrete operational - Middle or late childhood

(11 – 16 years) Formal operation - Adolescent and above

The level of thinking of children according to Strom et al (1989:83) evolves around these four stages. They also belief that the best way to help the learners is to understand these stages so that they can be presented with a curriculum they can understand at their level of thinking. The formal operational stage will only be discussed as adolescents are expected to be operating within that stage.

3.3.2.1   Formal operation

A transition from concrete operation to formal operation is a facet of early adolescents. The young person begins to think about thinking (Romano & Georgiady 1994:20).   Information processing in children increase as they grow older. They are able to hold more things in their minds and think about more things at once. This information processing cannot be taught to a child and it is also not provided by culture. I arises afresh by the experiences of a child. George et al (1998:53) state that as children perceive more and more of the world, their system of managing their intellectual life must change progressively to handle the new demands.

Formal operation is about thinking, classifying and performing operations. The mind is able to reverse the concepts presented. Learners are expected to think logically and be able to argue about statements given in a quite independent way. Intellectual development varies from one individual to the other. Other children during this stage may still operate under the preoperational stage due to a lack of positive experiences and significant others in their lives. It is not everybody who ever reaches this level of development as development varies in individuals (George et al 1998:54).

3.3.2.2   Implications for the learner

One of the most fundamental characteristics of intellectual development in adolescence involves egocentrism. Egocentrism is the perception held by children that their own point of view is the only one. Egocentrism focuses on the behaviours and attitudes of adolescents and includes aspects such as (a) finding fault with authority, (b) argumentativeness, (c) self-consciousness, (d) self-centeredness, (e) indecisiveness and (f) apparent hypocrisy (Yudkin 1984:18-25). Learners often display a heightened egocentrism and will argue to convince others or to clarify their own thinking (Wiles & Bondi 1993:34). Many adolescents still operate on an egocentric level. They think that bad things cannot happen to them but to others (Strom et al 1989:86). They are preoccupied with human behaviour and have little understanding of faith in self-control as a factor in social restrain. They accept rules from authorities as part of life and do not understand individual rights.

Educators need to assist learners move to a socio-centric perspective so that they can become socially responsible. By doing that learners will take responsibility of their own environment by reducing violence in their society. Learners should be helped to stretch their mental capacity to moral judgement in the atmosphere that supplies constructive feedback.

The early years of adolescents are frequently years of lowering of school grades and often of predictable failure (Wolman 1998:16). The transition of learners from an intermediate phase into a senior phase is sometimes dramatic to others and is associated with failure in school, truancy and dropping out of school. Adolescents who have low intellectual abilities often experience study and academic problems. They often lose interest in school work. Their poor academic performance may discourage them. Educators need to assist these learners in relevant study methods, how to deal with competition, motivation, time management and how to improve their memory skills. This will enable learners cope with their school work

The Life Orientation educator's role is to provide abundant opportunities for adolescents to engage in social interactions since they are helped by this means to rid themselves of their

egocentrism and to learn that people with different opinions from their own may be right while they are wrong (Gouws & Kruger 1996:71).

3.3.3   Emotional development

Emotions play a pivotal role in all aspects of growth and in the nurturing of human behaviour and positive, supportive healthy emotions are products of intimate and caring interactions between persons (Strom et al 1989:107). The support children get from parents, caregivers and teachers is the basis of how they will become emotionally (Strom et al 1989:107). Adolescents experience many emotions as they relate to their parents, peers, teachers and society at large (Mwamwenda 1995:75). Love, attachment and negative feelings like anxiety, fear and anger are all part of emotional development. The emotions that are common at this stage are anger, physical violence, aggression, fear, worry or joy.

During this stage a learner is striving to find his identity and the identity can be found if the child's childhood experiences and the new ones are integrated (Strom et al 1989:108). This movement into developing a new identity is not accomplished smoothly. It is often accompanied by problems which develop because of the lack of judgement needed to handle their new roles of independence. Learners with no support from parents establish a negative identity by becoming what parents and society do not want them to become. Romano and Georgiady (1994:21) indicate that young people still have a strong need for a home base to which they can return for comfort in times of stress. There is a frequent need for the security of childhood to balance the emerging young adolescent role.

3.3.3.1   *Implications for the learner*

The adolescence stage is associated with many bodily and emotional changes. There is an increase in conflicting emotions, shortened attention span, irritability, and impulsiveness, difficulty in persistent effort and regressive bed-wetting and nail biting (Wolman 1998:67). All these steps are difficult for the adolescent and he does not know how to handle them. Their

feelings are volatile and their actions are not in harmony with their verbal exclamations. Their self-control declines and puts them in a frustrating situation. All these mixed emotions which are often foreign to them can impact negatively on their school progress.

Educators need to be knowledgeable about the manifestation of these emotions. In a situation where learners depict outbursts of anger, the educator can be supportive towards the learner by developing a sense of humour and providing a shoulder to cry on whenever there is a need. Gouws (2004:33) maintains that educators must possess certain skills in handling emotions in an educational context and be mature in their own right.

The general behaviour of educators should be sound. Gouws, Kruger and Burger (2000**:**102) indicate that adolescents become aware of their educator's fallibility and of the alternative moral codes. It implies that educators have to be careful of their utterances as learners tend to disrespect an educator who uses vulgar words. Learners are able to question any statements and draw conclusions because of their level of reasoning. Understanding educators can alleviate these factors in a polite way so that a learner can feel safe and secure.

3.3.4   Social development

No man is an island, a person cannot live alone. People need to be part of peers and a larger community. Acceptance by peers is important in this stage. For the child to acquire appropriate behaviour, values and attitudes that are accepted in a certain milieu, parents, teachers and peers are the key contributors in modelling and internalising the expected behaviour or personality traits (Mwamwenda 1995:70). Adolescents move away from their parents and acceptance by peers is important to them.

Adolescents are vulnerable and like to please their peers by conforming. Conformity of adolescents to a group can be through mode of dress, hairstyles and grooming styles (Romano & Georgiady 1994:23). All these factors give an adolescent a sense of belonging which is important to them. They participate in activities which are relevant to their lifestyles like going

to parties. Through this participation they hope to demonstrate the differences between themselves and the adult or the child population and show their inner transformation through outer symbols (George et al 1998:100). Exclusion from participating in these activities can be due to lack of money from home or personal taste but inability to participate can be a painful experience which may lead to a battle with parents and educators. Some adolescents who fail to be accepted by a group end up being involved in stealing or violence just to be noticed. Normally adolescents form norms which bind them together. The norms can be good or destructive to someone who did not get a firm foundation or even support or guidance from home or school.

Adolescents move away from dependency of parents. They need role models they can study in the real world. Educators with positive attitudes and good academic skills can be a positive influence on these learners. Secure relationships with adults in their lives are important. Learners need opportunities to learn the correct behaviour for new situations and they need a place to try out these new behaviours in a safe environment.

3.3.4.1   Implications for the learner

Learners become more aware of the difference between sexes and the peer group helps to strengthen gender roles. Educators should guide the learners and discuss these concepts with them to facilitate an understanding. By doing so, learners will understand **the importance of relationships**. Open discussion about sexual relationships answers many questions that learners are afraid to discuss with parents and this can minimize learners falling prey to unprotected sex.

Educators should try to view their learners positively so that the learners reciprocate. If educators view learners negatively, the same will be true of the learners. Educators need to be on the lookout for peer groups that may have a negative effect on learners. The educator should not break up that peer group instead he or she should try to use positive reinforcements to change a peer group's negative influence, such as giving them specific responsibilities (Gouws 2004:35-36) identifies guidelines for supporting learners socially:

- Create learning opportunities where learners can participate in their peer group's activities.
- Help your learners to develop skills, so that they can make wise decisions about peer pressure.
- Learners develop social skills through communication and so create opportunities for them to improve and develop their communication skills.

3.4   PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED BY LEARNERS

The most important component of any treatment plan designed to help children in need is to assess accurately the nature of their difficulties (Kottler & Kottler 2000:29). Some of the difficulties experienced by senior phase learners are explained below.

3.4.1   Anxiety

Anxiety can be described as the opposite of love. If the child does not receive love he feels insecure and it is hard for such a child to relate and trust people easily. Children who experience anxiety normally withdraw from their peers. Developmental stages according to Roos (2002:65) cause anxiety. When children undergo those emotional, physical and social changes, they need an adult figure to guide them with certain things they do not understand. Children who experience anxiety and lack of support from adult figures will have difficulty in coping with life's challenges.

Gills (1994:160) state that children develop anxiety when they are faced with adjustment due to changing circumstances and when big decisions have to be made. According to Donald et al (2000:294) anxiety may manifest itself in the following defence mechanisms:

- Frequent crying sadness and depression;
- Disobedient, disruptive and attention seeking behaviour;
- Petty stealing, lying and avoiding behaviour;

- Withdrawn, timid, clinging or independent behaviour.

These emotional upheavals are mainly experienced by learners at school and it is important for educators to help them deal with them appropriately. If these emotions are not properly handled, they can be disruptive to their development and lead them to leaving school or even get involved in risk factors which will serve as their solace (Kottler & Kottler 2000:32)

3.4.2 Depression

There is a time in a person's life when one feels down since life is full of emotional ups and downs. When the blue episode becomes long lasting or interferes with one's ability to function on a daily basis, one might be suffering from depression (Roos 2002:70). Depression in children is caused by many factors such as failure to perform according to one's ability, having no friends and loss of the loved one. If one stays in this stage of sadness for a long time, one ultimately becomes depressed.

Depression affects one's mood, mind and behaviour. Sue, Sue and Sue (1997:335) explain depression as anger turned against self. Depressed people have a tendency of been hard on themselves and do not seem to see anything positive in life. Adolescents find it difficult to admit their self-criticism to themselves and to others (Gouws et al 2000:153). They have a tendency of running away from their problems by becoming involved in risk factors such as alcohol abuse, substance abuse, crime and turning against their parents. Understanding of depression symptoms by educators can alleviate many problems. Educators need to know when to refer a learner when such symptoms appear.

3.4.3 Divorce in the family

Divorce in our society seems to be a prevalent problem (Johnson 2002:78). Many learners are passing through this stage alone and they lack support of significant others in their lives. Many adults seem not to be aware of the impact of divorce on children's emotional development.

Depression and low self-esteem may characterise some of the reactions of children whose parents have been divorced (Johnson 2000:55). Smilansky (1992:34) writes that parental divorce and the question it raises about the impermanence of love and relationships is likely to affect the child's self-esteem and perception noticeably. Children turn to interpret their parents' divorce as their fault. They blame themselves and go through feelings of rejection.

Divorce does not only leave the child depressed and sad, it exposes the child to external factors such as economic hardships. If one parent leaves, financial difficulties may impact negatively on children's social interaction. Children may withdraw from interpersonal relations and become afraid to be involved due to fear of going through the same loss. Others are vulnerable and need reassurance to prevent them from falling into the wrong group. Friends may be a best source of support for children who come from the divorced families. Mednick, Baker, Reznick and Hocevar (1990:72) state that although peer relationships are largely independent on parent-child relationships, a child may seek to develop a relationship with peers that would compensate for the damaged parent-child relationship. Educator should be on the look out for such behaviours in order to assist the learners effectively.

3.4.4   Retrenchment of parents

Retrenchment refers to the practice of ending the period of employment of an employee for operational reasons often with a few months' extra salary to help the employee financially until he or she can find other means of employment (Uys 1992:27). The rate of unemployment in our country has plummeted and this leaves children starving or lacking basic needs. If the basic need of a person is threatened, one fails to function maximally. The survey by the HSRC (in Olivier 1989:23) showed that 13.9% of urban Black South Africans are either retrenched or have been fired. This indicates a high unemployment rate in our country and this impacts negatively on learners at school. The child is part of the family and the school, therefore, all the problems experienced at home will be carried to the school. Behavioural and emotional problems may be manifested due to the situation at home.

3.4.5   Suicide

Suicide among adolescents is increasing at an alarming rate. Disruptions in the family set up and lack of understanding of parents may lead to an adolescent committing suicide. Gouws et al (2000:155-156) outlay some of the factors that play a role in adolescent suicide:

- Disturbed family background;
- Absence of any warm parental figure with whom to identify, feeling emotionally and socially isolated;
- Depression;
- Stress;
- Immature personality with poor impulse control;
- Alcohol abuse;
- Being highly suggestible in following examples of others;
- The need to attract attention or sympathy or manipulate others.

The Life Orientation educator should try to be calmly involved with an adolescent at risk so as to be able to address factors that might affect them negatively. Educators should endeavour to be more sensitive to the problems that are experienced by adolescents. The educators should try and encourage adolescents to be open about their feelings so that they can provide appropriate support to them.

3.5   THE LIFE ORIENTATION EDUCATOR

The role of a Life Orientation educator has changed and there are new demands that are expected from them as stipulated in paragraph 2.4.1. The Life Orientation educator needs to know the following: the learning programme, work schedule and lesson plan. The implication is that the Life Orientation educator needs to be an expert in all these to effectively teach this learning area.

3.5.1 The qualities of Life Orientation educator

A Life Orientation educator should have the following innate qualities as outlined by Gouws (2004:80). These are few of such qualities:

- A calling to become a counsellor;
- A love for learners;
- An interest and concern for learners;
- Friendliness towards learners;
- Reasonable conduct;
- Level headed conduct;
- Humility towards learners;
- Wide interest;
- Openness and a sense of humour.

3.5.2 The role of Life Orientation educator

The role of Life Orientation educators has taken a new shape. These educators are met with a multitude of challenges that learners bring to school. It is imperative for educators to create a pleasant atmosphere in their classrooms where learners will be safe physically and secure psychologically to explore the world of ideas (Kottler & Kottler 2000:6). Trust is a cornerstone in trying to build rapport with learners. The educators need to be kind and helpful in guiding learners through their activities. The educators must work with learners towards building their self-esteem and self-respect. Kottler and Kottler (2000:7) maintains that the teacher must work towards fostering tolerance and cooperation in the classroom by adapting methods and styles according to the cultural backgrounds and individual needs of students.

Life Orientation educators need to construct the learning environment in such a way that it effectively challenges and enables learners to achieve real competence as productive, questioning and self-actualising citizens with a well developed concern for their fellows

(Lubisi, Wedekind & Parker 1997:15). They (educators) need to believe that learners have the ability to change. They should respect their freedom of will to make their own choices. It is the role of the Life Orientation educator to connect learners to strengths within themselves and to guide them to make their own informed decisions based on their strengths.

The Life Orientation educator needs to pay more attention to the external factors that disrupt the learners' daily life. There are many factors that can hamper the learning process and change the individual's life. These factors can disturb a learner from performing to his full potential. The absence of an adult figure in a child's life may lead to under performance of a learner. Kottler and Kottler (2000:7) state that children need to be reassured that they are safe and nothing will harm them. This is the role of an educator at school.

An effective Life Orientation educator is able to look out for behaviour and problems encountered by learners in a classroom. The educator should observe behavioural changes of appearance that occur or that are experienced during a lesson when a specific topic is treated to help such a learner in that regard. The messages observed can be expressed in a form of drama, art or creative writing.

3.5.3   Skills of the Life Orientation educator

3.5.3.1   Life Orientation educator as counsellor

The educational environment has become highly demanding and competitive. It furthermore requires of Life Orientation educators to be counsellors as there are many factors that create pressures on learners both in terms of adjustment and progression. Parents or other respected role models in the community may not be adequately qualified to deal with childhood stress as a result of social and emotional pressures or learning difficulties that may be the consequences of a demanding educational environment.

Senior Phase learners need educators' advice and affirmation which is what the educator should do as a counsellor. The educators are expected to help learners do the right things and correct them when they exhibit inappropriate behaviour. Middle school teachers should become engaged in helping young adolescents resolve their personal problems, should provide a sounding board, and should offer advice confidentially (Allen, Splittgerber & Manning 1993:119). Life Orientation educators should be able to protect learners from embarrassments and forms of discrimination. They should work hard at increasing the potential for personal growth, self-confidence, self-esteem and self-worth of these young adolescents.

Another aspect of Life Orientation educators is to encourage learners to direct their own learning and solve their own problems independently. Allen, Splittgerber & Manning (1993:119) state that the self-directed learner will continue to seek fulfilment throughout life. The educator as a counsellor should instil in learners the desire for self-improvement, to become self-motivated and to strive for personal success.

3.5.3.2   Listening

Listening is the first and indeed the most important act in communication. Children need to be heard and seen (Humphreys 1996:113). Listening skills give an educator an opportunity to understand the learners' non-verbal and verbal communication messages. It shows that one has an interest in what is being said. Being a perfect listener helps the students to feel comfortable and build trust in a relationship (Kottler & Kottler 2000:49). Teaching depends on the ability and will to listen. Educators need to listen to a learner's view and make them feel important. The child has the right to be listened to (Cowie & Perchereck 1994:23).

3.5.3.3   Empathetic relationship

Empathy is the way in which one puts oneself in the boots of another person by showing interest and understanding to the client. Empathy according to Kottler and Kottler (2000:48) is the ability to crawl inside someone else's skin and to know what she/he is experiencing. What

is emphasized is that the educator should be able to get outside himself or herself so that he or she can sense what the child is feeling and thinking. Every learner is valued and affirmed for his or her unique person and being. At all times the child should know that he or she is accepted as a person and that his or her behaviour is not the yardstick to measure worth (Humphreys 1996:85).

3.5.3.4 *Respect towards learners*

Respect is the ability of educators to communicate to their learners their genuine convictions that they have the inherent strength or ability to handle life and that all individuals have the right to make their own decisions and select their own alternatives (Roets 2002:97). Respect shown by educators will enable learners to discover their own strengths without fear of being ridiculed. Educators need to communicate their understanding of what they see, sense and hear in such a way that learners will not feel left out. Being able to be there for the child enables the educator to structure conversation in which a learner feels encouraged to explore his or her inner world (Wiechers 2002:61).

3.5.3.5 *Communication*

Communication is an important tool in every situation. Communication according to Vernon and Al-Mabuk (1995:32) is a two way street, and effective communication is essential for a healthy relationship. Educators should create a healthy relationship with their learners so that they could be able to talk to them even in an informal setting. This gesture will help learners to open up and share their problems.

3.5.3.6 *The ability to assess and notice distress*

The Life Orientation educator should be able to recognise a number of children's difficulties in order to assist them effectively. Children's difficulties include academic underachievement, cognitive deficits, learning disabilities, behavioural problems, and signs of child abuse (Kottler

& Kottler 2000:28). Children are fighting to establish themselves as autonomous, confident and competent human beings and they therefore need someone to be passionate about what they are going through. Kottler and Kottler (2000:28) further explain that children are working through a number of developmental transitions related to achieving physical, cognitive, emotional and moral maturity. They are dealing with family stressors and peer pressure and career decisions. The ability for an educator to recognise those signs will be beneficial to a learner.

3.5.3.7   *Confidentiality*

The educator should offer learners an opportunity to express their problems without fear of disclosure to the third party. Confidentiality can be a difficult issue in a school situation if the authorities do not understand how it works. The educator should make the school management aware of the importance of confidentiality so that he or she can be effective in his or her role. Educators should also know which aspects should not be treated as confidential especially those that put the lives of the learner and others in danger. Permission should first be granted by the learner before information can be divulged. The educator should create a relationship of trust so that the learner could feel free and secure to reveal him or herself (Gouws 2004:78). The educator should learn to keep the longings and troubles that the learner discloses to him or herself.

3.5.3.8   *Helping a learner to make choices*

The Life Orientation educator in his/her role as career guidance educator is expected to have in depth inside into this complex world in order to assist young people in their process of choosing a career (Lamprecht & Lamprecht 2002:8). This will be made possible by the knowledge educators possess about different careers in the society. They should also know which careers are still in demand in the market. Educators should prepare learners to realise expectations of the future, access additional and higher education and take their place in the society as responsible citizens (Department of Education undated:14). Life Orientation

broadens the range of career options for learners and it is imperative for educators to be fully equipped to assist learners.

Career choice determines the future prospects of every individual. It is for this reason that educators have a responsibility to assist learners fully in this regard. Learners need to be guided to acquire self-knowledge regarding their personality, interest and abilities in order to make an eventual career choice with confidence. The skill of an educator to assist and support learners during their years of attending school plays a pivotal role in their personal journey of discovery (Lamprecht & Lamprecht 2002:60).

3.5.3.9 *Helping learners with study skills*

Learners should be exposed to learning strategies and study skills which prepare them to access knowledge and assessment processes (Department of Education undated:14). Learning strategies according to Kruger and Adams (1998:97) can be defined as any behaviour and thoughts that help learners acquire new information by integrating that information with the existing knowledge. They should be guided into using this knowledge to set realistic goals, to schedule their study activities and to determine the kind of resources they will need to accomplish their learning goals. Educators should be more systematic and active in helping learners to 'learn how to learn' (Jones & Frederickson 1990:21).

3.5.3.10 *Educative intervention*

The educators should know how and when to interfere in a learner's life, such as when they notice him or her doing something wrong. Educators need to be clear in their motives when reprimanding learners. Educators should suggest few alternatives so that the learners can use their decision-making skills (Gouws 2004:77). Adolescents are in a period of emotional turmoil and they believe that everything they do or say is correct; therefore educators should be patient and understanding towards them.

3.5.3.11   Multicultural issues

In the current South African multicultural context, educators find themselves having to be of service to learners with a wide diversity of cultural, religious and ethnic backgrounds (Uys 1992:57). The educator can try to bring learners together by talking about different cultural activities. The prejudices held by people of different cultures can be addressed in a classroom context to give light to others. Educators should guard against generalisations, since generalisations lead to prejudices which affect the social development of a learner (Siann & Ugwuegbu 1980:127).

3.5.3.12   Competency

Educators should provide the service that they are competent in. They should know their boundaries and where and when to refer learners. In order to assist learners effectively, they should identify problems and know which ones they could handle to avoid frustrating learners.

3.5.3.13   A remedial educator

Curriculum 2005 which adopts the inclusive approach indicates that more learners with learning barriers will enter mainstream education classrooms. Inclusive education is about coping effectively with barriers to learning and development in the same class (Kruger & Adams 1998:233). Inclusive education according to the Department of Education (2001:16) is about acknowledging that all children and youth can learn and that all children and youth need support.

Some learners require intensive support to be able to develop to their full potential. These learners with learning barriers may not need academic attention, but they may be anxious, depressed and dependent on the teacher. They may also fear stigmatization and rejection and discrimination. It is the task of the educator to help these learners socialise successfully, to cope with their disabilities, to lead independent lives and optimally actualise their abilities (Kruger &

Adams 1998:19). The way educators cope with learners with learning disabilities is to arm themselves with the necessary knowledge and skills needed in inclusive education.

3.6 CONCLUSION

Academic performance in schools can be lowered by the emotional upheavals children are going through. Acting out behaviour and strained relationships with teachers due to inability to understand or accept what is going on in one's life impact negatively on scholastic performance. Educators and the school play an important role in the adjustment of the child's emotional well-being. The child should see a school as the place where stability is restored unlike the home where there is disruption and instability. Life Orientation educators' contribution towards assisting the learners in this regard is important. Schoonmaker (2002:23) emphasises that learning how to deal with the range of emotions of children is one of the challenges of learning, yet teachers are not offered guidance in learning how to deal with the powerful feelings evoked in classroom life.

The role and the skills of Life Orientation educators have laid the foundation for the need for training. The different skills required by Life Orientation educators have been explained. Chapter Four will describe the empirical design.