

## **CHAPTER 9**

### **REFLECTIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **9.1 Introduction**

The first sentence of this thesis states that this research journey was the beginning of the adventure into the second part of my life. It was an attempt not only to make this time meaningful but more importantly, significant. With my leaving Masupatsela at the end of 2002 and the completion of this document I bring to an end three exciting, fascinating, absorbing and exhausting years in the company of street children. During this time I spent a year getting to know them, a year teaching them and a year writing about them. It has been a journey that has humbled me, made me see life about me through the wiser eye of empathy, made me understand and appreciate my privilege and realise that but by the grace of God go I.

The discipline of research has focussed me and forced me to look deeply behind the surface of the everyday events and encounters of this study. It has insisted that I try and risk bravely, that I probe and dig continually and that I reflect and consider honestly. It has consumed my thoughts and filled my time but simultaneously been a rare privilege which I have greatly appreciated. I would have had it no other way.

Probably the greatest reward for my time and efforts was to see the trust and acceptance slowly return to the eyes of street children in my care. To see those stone eyes, filled with repeated adult abuse, soften with welcome and to experience hearts crying with past disillusionment and disappointment lighten with hope, was reward enough. Nobody who has worked closely with street children for any length of time can be left untouched and unimpressed by their resilience, their courage and their brave search for a better life.

In this last chapter I will reflect on my time with the street children both from a personal relationship point of view as well as my interactions with them in the formal settings of a school and classroom. From my experience I will also examine the implications that flowed from it and put forward some recommendations.

## **9.2 Overview**

### **9.2.1 The aim and rationale of the study**

The main purpose of this study was to look at a special programme, environment, method of teaching and learning and a more empathetic way of working with street children in a school specially established to cater for their needs.

Most of the street children who have been removed from the streets of Pretoria live in shelters run by churches or non-governmental organizations. In the past the majority of these children were unsuccessfully placed in mainstream schools where they found it very difficult to adapt to the routine, were caught up in very disruptive behaviour and came into conflict with both fellow students and teachers. Pretoria also has a large number of children still living on the streets. For these children virtually no educational opportunities exist. As a response to this situation Masupatsela school was started. With thirty five years of general educational experience and a year of working with street children, I believed that my approach to teaching and learning and to students could play a significant part in discovering a way to help these children to a better future. I decided that Masupatsela School would be a useful context to research this hypothesis.

My approach considered using an eclectic strategy of traditional and progressive teaching methods but with the emphasis on a Cognitive Teaching Style developed at the Centre for Cognitive Development (CCD, 1995). Integral to this approach is a relationship between teacher and student built on student centred psychological principals. The main elements of the Cognitive Teaching Style stem from a constructivist paradigm (Piaget, 1952) and relies on social learning (Vygotsky, 1978) strongly mediated by the teacher (Feuerstein et al, 1980). It makes use of an interactive questioning approach, cooperative learning, strategic academic reading as a learning aid and an emphasis on the role that language and active involvement plays in the construction of knowledge. The student centred approach relies on a supportive, encouraging and relaxed learning environment and teacher/ student relationship based on genuineness, empathetic understanding and unconditional positive regard (Rogers, 1951). Integral to the model is the provision of a classroom atmosphere and environment where thinking is valued and encouraged and where self-concept is developed.

### **9.2.2 Research methodology used in this study**

In designing the methodology I decided to move away from the traditional view to a more emerging and radical one of the social sciences. Social reality, and therefore teaching and learning, is regarded as a product of individual consciousness, knowledge is based on experience and insight of a unique and personal nature, and man is seen to create and control his environment. For these reasons a more subjective or anti-positivistic approach, which made use predominantly of qualitative methods, was chosen.

I decided to use an action research design which had technical, practical and emancipatory elements to it (Lewin, 1948; Carr and Kemmis, 1986; Grundy, 1987 and Walker 1990). These decisions allowed me to become a personal part of the study and the possible solutions. It also fulfilled my need for the application and evaluation of the cognitive teaching and learning model to be gradual, progressive and cyclical in nature.

The action research design consisted of four separate phases. These phases were a reconnaissance phase and three distinct cycles (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988). Each cycle consisted of planning, implementation and evaluation stages. A general plan was formulated after the reconnaissance phase and revised after each cycle. Elements of the cognitive teaching style were introduced incrementally over the three cycles. The entire process was monitored throughout. The process was also continually reflected on and the effects of my student centred approach and the environmental and contextual factors on the classroom were considered.

A variety of data collection methods were chosen so that method and investigator triangulated analysis could be applied to them. These methods included field notes, a professional diary, classroom observation, video recordings of lessons for further observation, questionnaires, interviews, achievement tests and other spontaneous and relevant documents. Thematic analysis was applied to most data sources with quantitative elementary statistical analysis applied to some. Data sources were then collated and triangulated.

### 9.2.2.1 The four phases of the study

#### *The reconnaissance phase:*

During the first part of this phase I spent six months working with the children at the Doxa Deo Shelter for street children run as part of the POPUP programme. Together with this programme, the second five months dealt with helping to establish the Masupatsela special needs school for street children.

This extremely valuable phase provided me with the opportunity of getting to know street children, considering what educational and psychological approaches might be successful with them, obtaining the consent and willingness to participate of all the individuals involved and to help create a suitable context for the research. It also accorded the time to win the trust of the people who would be involved and to understand the limitations and possibilities I would encounter. It provided the platform and experience for the implementation for the general plan over the three cycles and the specific issues for the first cycle.

#### *Cycle one:*

Cycle one consisted of two phases. Because of the uniqueness and newness of the school I used the first few weeks familiarising myself with the general school circumstances, the classroom environment and situation and to find out how the students dealt with these new conditions. I used this experience to decide on the initial methodological and psychological approach to use. During the second phase I introduced my student centred psychological strategy and a teaching methodology which consisted of a mixture of cognitive questioning and more traditional techniques of explanation and demonstration. I used a broad range of data collecting techniques such as field notes, a diary, student questionnaires, triangulated lesson observation, video taped lessons, achievement tests and other miscellaneous documents.

The main findings to come out of this phase were:

- My student centred approach, although exhausting to maintain within very challenging and trying student behaviour proved to be very successful and rewarding. In fact, through it I believe, my classroom became the one place in the school where the students were motivated to learn and where genuine learning took place.

- My fairly narrow eclectic approach of traditional teaching methods and the cognitive questioning aspect of the Cognitive Teaching Style was effective, well received and enjoyed by the boys. A lack of English competency on the part of the students was of concern.
- Contextual issues such as the structure of the school, teaching and learning resources, the curriculum and the competency of the staff were perceived as being negative by the students. This perception had a significant adverse effect on the atmosphere of my classroom and my ability to create an environment suitable for conscientious learning and for the students to accept the school as being authentic.
- Both psychological and physical factors played a considerable role the ability of the children to adapt to the formal school situation. Their past and present trauma and experiences, their anxiety about their futures, tiredness, hunger, addictions and their significant academic deprivation made the rigours and discipline of formal schooling and the classroom very difficult for them.

*Cycle two:*

The purpose of cycle two was to use the action used in cycle one and the information learned from it to adapt, adjust and revise the general plan in an attempt to make it more suitable and applicable. In an attempt to improve the contextual issues I involved myself to a greater extent in the management and organization of the school, the training of the staff and I listened to the aspirations, expectations and yearnings of the learners. In an attempt to overcome some of the English language deprivation, the lack of cooperation, the egocentrism and lack of mutual trust between the learners, I decided to expand the methodology of cycle one to include cooperative learning. Because my student centred approach had been so successful, I decided to continue and deepen this approach. I had realised in the reconnaissance phase and cycle one that a sound and positive educator/learner relationship based on mutual trust and respect was crucial and the basis for any success in a classroom of street children. To the data gathering methods used in cycle one, I added learner interviews and a teacher questionnaire.

The main findings to come out of this phase were:

- The most consequential, obtrusive and disturbing feature of this cycle was the deterioration in

the general behaviour of the boys at the school. This took the form of centrally directed “pack” behaviour and consisted of aggressive, arrogant, contemptuous and brutal verbal attacks and behaviour patterns with the other teachers, especially females, in the school. It had a serious and damaging effect on the ethos and running of the school, the morale of the staff and spilled over with devastating consequences for learning into the classrooms. In order to deal with this situation the school counsellor introduced a psychological programme into the school and especially with those boys directly involved (Magdel Harper, 2003).

- In contrast to the above situation, through my continued student centred approach, my relationship with the boys and my classroom atmosphere had improved steadily. A productive, constructive, relaxed, fertile and trusting learning milieu existed. We had developed a level of mutual trust and respect that made effectual learning not only possible but successful.
- The addition of cooperative learning was only partially successful. On the one hand the students did become more actively involved by doing investigations with equipment, more English was used and more communal thought and discussion occurred. However, on the other hand, with their independent spirits, cooperation and role acceptance when doing group tasks proved difficult for many boys. A more flexible, on the spot and adaptable methodological approach to everyday classroom reality was required.
- The English deprivation was such that further individual and communal language resources were necessary.

### *Cycle three*

In terms of methodology the goal of the third cycle was to extend and refine the teaching style in order to address the weaknesses experienced and identified in the previous two cycles. I knew that it had been my strategy of quiet concerned firmness, of proficient heartfelt teaching, my continual forbearance and my ongoing belief in their potential, that had made the difference, that had won their respect, that had made them willing and keen to participate in my lessons and to leave most of their “pack” behaviour behind when they were with me. In order to deal with the disruptive behaviour I experienced in my class from time to time, I decided to cooperate very closely with the school counsellor by providing feedback to her with regard to the programmes she was running with the boys.

In terms of methodology I made the decision to use a more varied and flexible approach and adapt each lesson to the mood of the learners that day, the nature of the material being presented and what I wanted to achieve with them. As an addition to the methodology I brought in the concept of strategic reading of academic text to learn. By providing them with a academic reading strategy I believed I would be enabling them to read productively for information, improve their English and provide background knowledge for the lessons that would follow.

The main findings of this final cycle were:

- Through a persistence with the student centred approach throughout the year my relationship with the learners during this cycle had improved to such a point where effective mainstream type teaching and learning could take place in my classroom - a far cry from when I started.
- The strategic reading programme introduced during this cycle proved most enjoyable and effective with the boys.
- Because of a stabilization in school organization, a firm school policy on behaviour and a strictly enforced student code of conduct a very fragile and brooding level of student acceptance prevailed in the school.

I believe the choice of a predominantly qualitative action research in this kind of ethnographic investigation was appropriate. The cyclical nature of the approach allowed me to plan, introduce and change prospective solutions gradually and incrementally rather than all at once. It provided me with time to adapt on the run to real problems that arose. I found being an active participant in the trenches of the research and not a detached, distant observer exciting, challenging and very rewarding. The close involvement and the immersion in the day to day reality gave it a sense of genuineness and realness to me. The passion and intensity it released in me, however, warned me against the possibility of increased subjectivity. I constantly had to remind myself to build in checks and balances of triangulated methods and observations. The primary aim of action research of this nature, as stated in chapter one, is the improvement of practice in immediate settings through practical actions and systematic reflection on them. In terms of these criteria I believe that this study has provided valuable insight into some psychological and educational aspects of teaching street children in the formal setting of a school.

### **9.3 Key issues and recommendations emerging from this study**

#### **9.3.1 Introduction**

When reflecting on the key aspects concerning the psychological and educational issues of teaching street children in the formal setting of a school researched in this study, two broad categories emerged. The first had to do with the macro contextual concerns of the whole school environment - its establishment, maintenance, leadership, management, funding, organization and staffing. The second was concerned with the more narrow micro facets of the classroom. Here the educator/learner relationship, the classroom environment and atmosphere and the methodology used are of particular interest. The latter category has to do with the conditions necessary for the introduction and maintenance of an effective teaching style and classroom environment for street children, the former with its support, encouragement, advancement and sustainability.

I would like to state that the views expressed in this study reflect and hold for my experience in general and the particular context where the research was carried out. It is with this limitation in mind that I reflect on the issues.

#### **9.3. 2 The macro contextual issues**

##### **9.3.2.1 Outside conditions necessary for the formal education of street children**

It was my experience at Masupatsela that the first children to fade to sleep or trance in the classroom out of either exhaustion or substance abuse and later to drop out of school, were those children who lived and slept on the street and in the flats of Sunnyside. These were the children whose books were understandably tattered, lost or misplaced and who seldom had writing equipment. These were the children who most often appeared at school unkempt, dirty, hungry, cold, exhausted or spaced out. The ongoing energy and effort needed to survive, “zula” money for food, pay for their tiny sleeping places, walk back and forth to school, resist the seductive freedom, temptations and lure of the streets and accept the constricting rigidity of the formal school situation, proved just too much for them. One by one they returned to the inviting independence of street life until there were none left at the school.

It is my opinion that ongoing formal education with these children who are still on the street is almost impossible. Before conventional schooling or for that matter any formal programme can commence with

them, they need to be removed from the street and the basic requirements of survival such as food, shelter, clothing, health care and some form of adult care provided - even then success is in doubt. Without these basic conditions in place schooling and learning which need high levels of concentration are not possible. This was evidenced by the fact that those who attended school most regularly, who remained at school the longest and were most successful at Masupatsela, were the children from the shelters or who boarded privately with relatives and friends. To expect children to survive on the streets and attend school to educate themselves on their own volition, is just not realistic.

### **9.3.2.2 Establishing educational institutions for street children.**

At the end of November 2002 I left Masupatsela school to begin the writing of this thesis. In January of 2003 the children returned to the school to continue their education. This they did until early in February 2003 when they were told to leave as the school was being closed because of a lack of funds. Society and adults in particular had let them down once again and confirmed their opinion of them. The institution which had reached out to them and provided an educational lifeline had itself been caught up in the demoralizing and overwhelming pall and worry of tertiary rationalization rumour and reality. The boys had become a troublesome bother, an unnecessary complication, a financial irritation on the skin of wider and more important issues. And so they were understandably jettisoned to their own recourse. They were angry and disillusioned and they had the right to be so.

At this same time the darker side of J, Pretoria's street child's champion, their caring house father, their benefactor, so called fund raiser and the initiator, instigator and driving force of their school, emerged. Gradually from the later part of 2002 he lost interest in the school project and slowly withdrew. The "razz-ma-tazz", publicity, the bright lights and excitement of creation had been replaced by the necessary invisible grind and hard work of ongoing maintenance and sustainability. This mundaneness was not for him and he suddenly disappeared without a trace from Pretoria, school and shelter leaving the rumour and clouds of grim and sullen deeds behind him. The children had experienced their slowly placed trust shattered once more by an adult with hidden motives. They had been used for private agendas and when boredom, fear or regularity had set in they had been dumped. When told that the school was closing it was difficult for the children to understand the institutional, technical and financial reasons for its closure. In their eyes they had been let down not by nebulous abstract factors such as

these but by people and especially by adults in whom they had placed their trust. I suppose these disappointments and disillusionments were just further wounds to their already traumatised psyches. It is what they had come to expect from society and adults. Their perceptions had been reinforced. What was different?

After the closing of Masupatsela the street children were forced to find other schools to accept them - a difficult task in itself considering their reputation and histories. So in a matter of three years they had attended three different schools. They had arrived at Masupatsela bright eyed with enthusiasm, keen that a school had been created for them and hopeful that it would provide them with what they needed for a new life. Unfortunately as the year unfolded these expectations had been eroded by a creeping despondency and finally they had been abandoned by society in the form of an institution and by adults in the shape of an individual who had promised so much, who had built up their expectations and then fled.

To avoid this dreadful scenario of disappointment and letdown in the future it is imperative that when projects are started for street children they are thought through properly, that sufficient initiation and maintenance funding is in place to start and sustain them and that the motives of those involved are in the interest of the children. Good intentions, hype, frothy enthusiasm, private ambitions, sordid ulterior motives, altruism and even hard work are not enough. It's a sad but true fact that in situations like this where the basic amount of money for essentials is absent, in the end the motivation of those involved fades, despondency sets in and finally physical, psychological and emotional exhaustion causes closure.

I find it very difficult to decide whether creating special schools for street children like Masupatsela is the answer to educating street children. On the one hand their academic deprivation, their psychological trauma and their learned adult spirit of freedom give them special needs which through experience creates havoc in mainstream schools, especially when there is a critical mass of them in one school. They are reluctantly admitted to these schools with prejudice, they come with predetermined reputations and often fall victims to self-fulfilling prophecies of failure. On the other hand it is precisely the integration into normality, exposure to positive role models and absorption into conventionality that

ordinary schools offer, that they desperately need and crave for. More in depth research is needed into this issue before an answer to this question can be found.

### **9.3.2.3 School organization**

For a school for street children to succeed it is imperative for it to be perceived and accepted by the students as being “proper”, authentic, credible and meeting *their* aspirations (Swart, 1990; Goodenow and Grady, 1992; Fine 1986). Masupatsela showed that street children are very sensitive to and intolerant of the idea that their school was second rate or different from mainstream schools. Without their belief and trust in and acceptance of the leadership, management, teaching staff, curriculum, resource situation and practical school organization such as time-tabling and grading of students, an undercurrent of discontent soon arises and grows into flagrant disruptive and aggressive behaviour which permeates the whole school. Because they realise they do not have any more time to waste and because they have little respect for most adults, they are willing to confront issues which they are not happy with head on and vociferously. On the other hand when mutual respect and trust has been won, when they perceive the above school issues to be in place, like they did in my classroom on a more micro level, teaching them became very similar to that of ordinary schools.

Because of their strong personal views about their future and their ardent sense of independence, their standpoints and ideas need to be listened to and their participation negotiated when decisions which will affect them are discussed and planned. Unilateral implementation which does not fit their frame of acceptability and vision will be resisted with venom and unpleasantness (Foley, 1983). Conversely, their single-mindedness, arrogance, their lack of ability to see viable alternatives, practical limitations and unavoidable restrictions and their need for immediate gratification, at times, makes realistic negotiation trying and difficult.

Class size is also a critical factor in working with street children in a formal setting like a school. Because of their individual and varying academic deprivation, their specific emotional and psychological needs and dictates and their egocentricity, they place extremely heavy demands on the educator. I found that to have more than fifteen street children in my class, problematic and exhausting. This point holds important consequences for enrollment, staffing and class size.

#### **9.3.2.4 Staffing**

Probably the aspect of the school that affected it most were the teachers. It must be remembered that the majority of the staff at Masupatsela were unpaid volunteers appointed because of their availability and willingness and not because of their qualifications, experience or proven competence. It soon became apparent and was expressed openly by the students, that they did not regard most of the teachers as being sufficiently suitable, capable, knowledgeable or competent. Initially this led to a lack of acceptance, regard and respect by the students and resulted in the teachers, especially the females, being attacked verbally by individual students. Later this discontent with the staff deepened, their lessons were brutally disrupted and they were verbally assaulted and belittled through the vicious and ruthless use of the quietly organised “pack” behaviour. Not having the necessary training, experience and at times the knowledge or a commanding presence, they were defenceless. Classroom life for them was hell.

In contrast to this situation my class was a haven of good relationships, trust, respect, normality, order, discipline and productive learning. Evidence of this was highlighted in the video taped lessons, the student’s quiet continuance with their studies when I left the classroom and their honest concerned inquiries when I was absent. It was possible to create an environment and atmosphere commensurate with good teaching and learning practice but it took all of my thirty five years of educational experience, a Masters degree in Education, the gift of a strong presence and personality, the motivation of doctoral research, a strategic methodological plan and a definite student centred psychological approach, to create and maintain it. Even with all this after ten months at the school I was physically, psychologically and emotionally exhausted.

When creating an educational facility for street children therefore staffing is a crucial ingredient - far more so than mainstream schools. Because of their serious academic deprivation, their challenging behaviour, their confrontational egocentrism, their strong sense of personal freedom, their lack of inherent respect for adults and their definite ideas of what they want for themselves, the very best educational leaders, school managers and teachers are required to educate them. It is essential to find educators who are extremely well trained in their subjects, field or grade, who have in depth experience in dealing with children with special needs such as street children, who are highly motivated, who are

resilient, flexible, creative and emotionally tough and who genuinely believe in the potential of the street children before them. This is in agreement with Ennew's (1994) warning that the quality of people working with street children should be the best- the most professional people available. To throw unpaid, undertrained, inexperienced and often frightened educators who lack confidence into a school of 120 street children or into class of fifteen of these boys, is to throw defenceless lambs to ravenous lions and not fair to the boys or the educators.

### **9.3.2.5 Curriculum**

It was decided from the inception of Masupatsela to follow a curriculum as close to mainstream schooling as possible. This involved the learning areas associated with Outcomes Based Education and Curriculum 2005. However because of a lack of staff and expertise in certain learning areas this was not completely possible and a curriculum resulted which was built around the strengths of the available staff. Added to this basic curriculum was added computer lessons and infrequent and unsuccessful attempts to involve the children in sport and cultural activities.

The school had a fully equipped pottery studio but never the funds to operate it or to appoint somebody to run it.

The students were very critical of this arrangement and continually requested and demanded a curriculum more like a "proper" school. They were also unrealistic and held overinflated opinions with regard to their own abilities and to the level of work to be covered in the classes. They demanded content, especially in Mathematics, which took no regard of their mathematical deprivation and huge gaps in their mathematical knowledge. If in grade 8 they unreasonably insisted on work from a text book of that grade. Most also, idealistically and impractically, believed that their future lay in following a purely academic education. From my experience probably less than ten percent were in the situation to continue with this route. The English ability of the majority also showed no relation to the standard needed to cope with the demands of the grades they were in.

On reflection at the end of the year I came to the conclusion that the almost comprehensively academic orientated programme the school was offering was not suitable or even desirable. It was too static, too theoretically dense, too institutionally driven and was based on reward and payback too distant for the

immediate gratification mind set of the children. The negative disruptive student behaviour, which had dominated the school and most classrooms so dramatically throughout the year, also needed to be considered seriously. Based on my experience and before leaving the school I suggested to the leadership and management of the school a more balanced approach to the curriculum was required - a curriculum which included formal and non-formal strategies and one which embodied the academic, the vocational, recreational and the therapeutic. Situating this programme under the auspices of Pretoria College would be ideal because the majority of the facilities for the programme could be available from the college. My innovation was accepted and was to be implemented in 2003. The programme followed by the students was planned to involve the above four components.

#### *1. The academic component. Functional literacy and numeracy programmes*

It is my opinion that functional literacy and numeracy is basic and vital for the successful reintegration of these children into mainstream society and to provide them with the hope of earning a legitimate living which would provide a future for them. A functional literacy and numeracy approach would replace the broad and heavily academic programme of multi-learning areas presently in use. Because of the different levels of social and emotional development, I suggested that age cohorts be established and that individual, pair or small group teaching according to ability within these groups be used. I also suggested that the teaching methods and student centred approach I had used successfully and researched in this study be incorporated in the teaching of these two areas. As suitable ability, age and culturally relevant literacy and numeracy materials for South African street children are extremely scarce, these would need to be found or written. The Association of Christian School International is at present busy with this essential task. During this programme the children would be assessed and those with the potential for mainstream schooling would be transferred to schools willing to accept them.

#### *2. The vocational component. Practical income generating skills*

Alongside the functional literacy and numeracy programme should run either short or long programmes of practical vocational skills which have the potential to provide the boys with an income when they leave the school. These skills could involve more conventional activities such as welding, brick laying or pottery or lesser activities such as making products to sell using wire, leather, wood, fabric or waste materials. The scope of these skills will depend on the financial, staffing and physical resources of the

project. For instance at Masupatsela the physical resource of a pottery room for fifteen children was available and ready but the finances were so limited that staff could not be found to run it or materials bought. It was my vision that these programmes would be conducted not as merely skills training but on a practical small business basis. Therefore basic small business, financial, management and marketing principles should be incorporated practically in these programmes as well.

### *3. The recreational component: Sports and cultural activities.*

First, it was very clear while at Masupatsela that amongst the boys were very talented and frustrated sportsmen, musicians, singers, actors and artists. In fact towards the end of 2002 a group of four of them were discovered by a South African record company and they spent the last two months recording a CD of their very original rap music to be released locally and overseas. A few of them also travelled overseas in sports teams.

Street children confined within the walls and grounds of a formal school display a tremendous amount of energy. If the programme followed by the school does not have within it a way of using this ebullience positively it often finds its way to the surface in the form of very obstreperous, disruptive and negative behaviour. The corridors, classrooms and surrounds become places of shouting, running, fighting and boisterous jostling. A way of turning this virulent negative energy into a positive and constructive force, is essential.

Second, safe and acceptable outlets that will absorb and channel the anger, disillusionment, rage, pain, frustration, hurt and disappointments of the boys' previous and present lives which simmer just beneath the surface of their control, are needed. It was clear to me, in the short time and few occasions that we were able to provide drama, art, choir and limited sporting activities at Masupatsela, how beneficial and therapeutic they were for the students. I still have the picture in the eye of my mind of E in grade 7, with increasing willingness and wider confident smiles, offering his trauma to me, thinly disguised in the short stories he brought.

Because of the intensity and demands of the classroom and the often lack of expertise, these sporting and cultural activities should not form part of the regular teachers' function. A qualified and enthusiastic

person should take charge of this area of the programme and organise and conduct it in a way that is experienced by the students as being serious, authentic and important. They should not be seen as merely activities to pass time. Some ideas to create this authenticity could be sports uniforms that are unique, the conclusion of contracts of participation and commitment with the students, meaningful matches and performances arranged for them and increasing and purposeful exposure to mainstream life negotiated.

#### *4. The therapeutic component: Psychological and emotional support programmes*

It is my contention that for any formal education programme with street children to achieve a level of success the invasive and often dominating psychological and emotional issues caused by the traumatic past need to be dealt with. It is crucial that a parallel programme dealing with these aspects run concurrently with the previous three components. Fortunately at Masupatsela we had Magdel Harper as the school counsellor. During 2003 she introduced a very successful intervention with the boys as part of her doctoral thesis (Magdel Harper, 2003). Her programmes were based on Transactional Analysis as she believed this theory and practice could play a significant and meaningful part in their healing process. The central issues in the programme were those of accountability and forgiveness and their purpose twofold. First, they were aimed at addressing the children's emotional needs and second, to hold up a model of change in order to provide an alternative way of dealing with life (Magdel Harper, 2003).

Children at risk often have difficulty in recognizing and understanding emotions. When their emotional needs are dealt with as well as their disempowering and negative behaviours such as blaming, aggression, egocentrism, victim behaviours and insensitivity to others' vulnerability, it is possible to assist them to adjust to mainstream society and build constructive interpersonal relationships. This is because the opportunity is provided for them to think about their beliefs and behaviours and the impact that these have on themselves and others. However making the boys aware of these needs and behaviours is not enough. It is also important to expose them to a way of changing their behaviour and interpersonal relationships which are detrimental when operating in a formal school setting and mainstream society. The programme is designed help them to:

- put past experiences into a context

- understand themselves, their past experiences and trauma as well as the effects of these on them
- make them aware of their own beliefs, opinions and thinking
- gain insight into how people can adapt to trauma or oppressive situations.

When children experience a process like this it is possible to create counselling opportunities, reaffirm the boy, enhance his strong points and resilient factors and empower him to become responsible for changing himself and his future life script (Magdel Harper, 2003).

I saw the positive effects of this programme in my own classroom and in the school as a whole. I am sure there are other approaches that would also be very beneficial. However what is certain is that a programme of this nature should run concurrently with the other three components.

In retrospect it was these macro contextual conditions that had the most detrimental effect on the school especially in its early stages and which in the end closed its doors. Just when the lessons had been learnt, the necessary changes were to be implemented and the children's patience, perseverance and forbearance was to be rewarded sadly larger political issues swamped the experience and intentions and a lack of money stopped everything.

### **9.3.3 The micro classroom issues**

#### **9.3.3.1 Educator/learner relationships**

In my experience by far the most influential factor on creating an environment and atmosphere for the successful teaching and learning with street children in a formal setting, is the relationship that is established with them. It was my relationship of mutual trust, respect and understanding, gained through the use of the student centred approach described in chapter two, that enabled me to achieve the pleasing level of academic and personal success with the children that I did. By the end of the second cycle I had achieved a relationship with the children that compared very favourably with those I had managed in mainstream schools.

It is also the lack of this type of relationship that existed between the boys and the majority of the other

teachers which resulted in the arrogant, often brutal, contemptuous and disrespectful individual and “pack” behaviour and, in most cases, the failure of productive learning to take place. It was my observation that as soon as teachers retreated through fear, a lack of confidence, a dearth of alternatives or anger into an authoritarian, oppressive and inflexible interactive style, the students responded in kind. Sadly, it was these teachers who experienced the brunt of the “godfathers” organised hell.

The student centred style of interaction, on the other hand, that I used successfully made use of the following principles (Rogers, 1983):

- The development of the self-concept is vital for successful learning. This can be achieved through positive self-regard and approval and self-affirmation the boys receive, especially from significant others. To achieve these goals the educator needs to make sure that classroom experiences, which provide accurate and honest affirmation and which are congruent with their potential, are created. Honest praise, appropriate physical contact, encouragement, sensitivity to individual needs and a warm, caring and patient classroom atmosphere are ways to achieve this.
- To facilitate learning educators need to be themselves, be congruent, be genuine and communicate their feelings if appropriate.
- The educator needs to respect and trust children and believe in their potential.
- Educators need to be able to put themselves into the position of the learner and in so doing be sensitive to and understand the child’s world.

Other issues which played a significant part in establishing a successful relationship with the children were their appreciation of my confidence, competence and content knowledge, my enthusiasm, lesson preparation, firm and fair discipline with respected boundaries, the strong presence of my personality, the extrinsic rewards I introduced and my sense of humour and fun.

It was the ongoing application of these principles under trying circumstances, I believe, that won me their trust, respect, cooperation, and for some, their love. The boys wanted to be with me and enjoyed coming to my class for the lessons. It was also this approach which formed the basis and allowed me

to introduce my different teaching methodologies successfully.

The ability to establish and maintain this type of classroom relationship with street children is crucial and should be an extremely high priority when selecting and appointing educators to work with them. To overlook this compelling and critical aspect is to set up classrooms, learners and educators for failure and to court institutional chaos.

### **9.3.3.2 Learner behaviour**

In general terms there was a stark contrast with regard to the behaviour of the boys in my class and in the other classes and the school in general. Although there were sporadic episodes of disruptive and difficult student behaviour in my lessons, these formed the exception rather than the rule. In most cases my lessons were characterised by attentive, interested, respectful, active and participatory students. In most other classes the reverse was true. These classrooms were often places of student noise, disrespect, inactivity, anger, chaos, disruption, idleness, inertia, boredom and indolence. I believe that learner behaviour in my classes contributed to learning because of the relationship I had established with the boys, the positive learning environment and atmosphere I had created and the varied teaching methodologies I used with them. It was also through this approach that I was able to overcome and negate the very powerful and negative outside contextual problems of the school. The failure in the other classes was due to a lack of success in one or more of these three classroom areas as well as the serious impact of the wider contextual issues which overwhelmed them.

By far the most general behavioural phenomena to have emerged was that of the “pack” syndrome. This extremely disruptive and negatively effective behaviour was quietly organised and enforced by “godfathers” and carried out by fellow willing and unwilling hench- and hit men through the use of peer intimidation and fear. It was aimed directly and deliberately at chosen teachers - mainly female and ruthlessly executed. It took the form of general defiance with regard to listening, writing and carrying out instructions, arriving late and randomly walking out of classes, vicious, scathing and abusive verbal attacks on the teacher, walking about and talking across the classroom at will, rejecting teachers and picking spontaneous fake and real fights amongst themselves. It had a devastating effect on teacher confidence, morale and commitment, led to demoralisation and fear amongst the teachers and

permeated into the whole fabric of the school.

The reasons for this powerful learner behaviour, according to the literature, lie in early adulthood, lifestyle, lack of exposure to mainstream society and the unsuitability of traditional school structures (Williams, 1992;1993;1996). The formal structure of the school also clashed directly with the boys' highly valued adult freedom gained on the street. From their homes and on the street they developed disrespect for adults, they learned to think independently and to satisfy their needs and wants immediately (Foley, 1983; Schurink, 1995). Their changed lifestyle in a school with its unfamiliar atmosphere and environment can release powerful, volatile and explosive emotions (Foley, 1983). Boredom and a lack of respect for perceived uncaring and incompetent staff are also other possible reasons (Williams, 1992; 1993). Finally deviant behaviour results when the children see the school as not being authentic. For teachers to successfully handle the extremely difficult demand that this behaviour places on them, specialised training and coping strategies are required as well as a psychological and counselling programme in the school (Magdel Harper, 2003). Understanding these causes makes formulating strategies to deal with the behaviour easier.

As an educator, one of the most frustrating aspects of the students behaviour is their often lack of concern for the normal routines, rules, conventions, systems and practices of a formal school. School starting and ending times are mere guidelines, period bells are ignored according to whims, breaktimes are lengthened randomly, books and writing equipment are forever being lost, stolen or misplaced and negotiation for improvement in these areas is most often met with surprise and procrastination of any improvement. Falling asleep instantly and at inappropriate times in class is an acceptable and often practised activity, bickering is endemic and egocentrism a way of life. On the other hand, when their trust has been won, they can be spontaneously affectionate, refreshingly candid and warmly appreciative of kindness.

A crucial factor in dealing with street children's behaviour in a formal school setting is to have a mutually negotiated and accepted code of conduct and clear guidelines with regard to deviance from it, in place. It is imperative for it to be applied throughout all the classrooms and school by a competent and caring principal and teachers. When this code of conduct breaks down in any one area and control is lost,

its effect spreads and is felt throughout all the other classrooms with exhausting, disruptive and later crippling effect.

Again the ability of staff to deal effectively and maturely with a wide range of difficult, abrasive, aggressive, devious and diverse individual and communal behaviours, is critical and essential. Without order and discipline in the classroom very little teaching and learning is possible. On the other hand the ability to recognise and reward appropriate, exemplary and commendable conduct is also crucial. This competence and sensitivity to deal with challenging and agreeable behaviour holds important concerns for the experience, abilities, training, skills and knowledge of the educators appointed to work with street children.

### **9.3.3.3 Methodology**

On pondering on the methodologies used incrementally through the three cycles I realised that when deciding on which methodology would be appropriate two deprivation issues always raised their head. The first was concerned with language and especially English deprivation. This I had found was endemic to all students studying in a second or foreign language. Street children were no different. The second had to do with academic content and skills deprivation. This was especially true in a sequential learning area like Mathematics.

If teaching and learning are to be effective, communication between the educator and learner is essential. This condition is even more critical if an interactive, participative and cooperative classroom methodology such as the cognitive teaching style is used. The higher the competency level of both teacher and learner in the medium of instruction, the greater the success of the method. Language also plays a significant part in the formation of concepts and therefore the construction of knowledge. To ensure deeper conceptual understanding and to provide a window into the understanding achieved by the students, opportunities need to be created in lessons where learners verbalise and write down, preferably in their own words, their comprehension of ideas.

Spans of concentration of street children are also most often shorter than mainstream children.

I realised, because of these considerations, using the purely traditional methods of explanation, demonstration and telling would not achieve these aims.

I found the English ability of the street children, especially at the beginning, to be very weak. I realised that if English competency is important in learning and I wanted to improve it, then as many opportunities as possible needed to be created that would expose them to it and get them to use it. I believe that the cognitive teaching style with its supportive and encouraging learning environment, its interactive questioning, its concentration on the languaging of concepts both orally and in written form, its cooperative group work and its cognitive approach to the use of text to learn, provides many of these needed situations. The cognitive teaching style approach also met another important aim of education - that of developing thinking learners. This approach provided regular and consistent challenges for the learners to think and to express their thinking publically and in writing.

Of all the methods I used, cooperative learning proved to be the most difficult to apply successfully. I believe it was the egocentrism, the independent spirit and the lack of formal cooperative skills of the boys such as compromise, persuasion and the ability to listen to others that made it difficult for them. On the other hand, the skills and roles of mainstream cooperation are precisely the ones they need and so perseverance in this form of learning would be advisable.

I also believe that the pooled and combined knowledge of the group went some way to fill in the language and content deprivation gaps of the individuals.

An important part off educating street children is to provide them with tools for educating themselves. Giving them a strategic reading for information strategy was an attempt to do this as well as provide them with background language and content knowledge for lessons to come.

Although the cognitive teaching style model is based on very strongly on intensive interaction between the educator and learners and between learners and their peers, this does not mean that the more traditional methods of teaching should be disregarded. Not all street children learn in the same way or want to. Street children, because of their nature, need varying and constant stimulation. To meet these different learning styles and to maintain interest, an eclectic variety of methods need to be used which include the traditional methods as well.

Again these methodology requirements place heavy demands on the educator of street children to be flexible, skilled, knowledgeable, experienced, creative, sensitive and enthusiastic - a demanding ask of

anybody.

#### **9.3.3.4 The effect of teaching street children on teachers**

Without a doubt educating street children in the formal setting of a Masupatsela was for me the most demanding and challenging teaching I have ever attempted. The effect on me was one of physical, psychological and emotional exhaustion to the point that I had to consult my doctor and withdraw from the school for three weeks towards the end of the year. On the other hand it was also extremely rewarding, satisfying and fulfilling for me when mutual trust and respect was in place, the classroom environment and atmosphere had developed to one of warm caring and the boys began to enjoy and succeed with the learning.

The impact of the school as a whole and the classroom on the other volunteer teachers was even more dramatic with breakdowns, resignations, absenteeism, ill health and short stays often occurring. The individual and “pack” behaviour as well as the sexual view of the older boys put extreme psychological and emotional pressures on the young female teachers especially. However even some of the older more experienced female teachers were targeted. Teaching at Masupatsela pushed them to the limits and beyond of their private and professional resources.

Teaching street children and dealing with their behaviours is not a place for the inexperienced, timid or the faint hearted. It requires qualities of psychological and emotional toughness, resilience, patience, conviction, the ability to bounce back, flexibility and the capacity to stand back from the immediate, reflect from above it, determine what is really happening and decide why. It is not for one dimensional teachers, teachers with fixed authoritarian ideas, teachers whose motives are just to have a job or teachers who are insensitive and uncaring. Street children in the confines of a classroom will destroy these teachers and make their teaching lives hell. On the other hand to win their reluctantly given approval, acceptance and confidence and to see the warmth for you and what you do with them in their eyes, is a wonderful privilege. It provides a quiet personal sense of satisfaction and achievement that very few other teaching situations can compete with. Teaching street children in a classroom, for the educator, therefore involves working on the exciting, in your face cutting edge of education.

## 9.4 Conclusion

And so I come to the end of the first exciting adventure in the second part of my life. I wanted a journey filled with passion, creativity, inspiration, challenge and most importantly significance.

What I received was a gift of much more value. What started out as a simple phone call from a special friend ended as a compelling quest of three years into a world, on the one hand of heartache, abuse, suffering, anguish, hardship and let down but on the other a voyage of hope, insight, humility, wisdom and significant personal growth. The pursuit was never dull, never mundane and never easy. It was one that I would not have missed for anything. I hope from amongst its pages will come thoughts that will have meaning and usefulness for others who venture into the heartbreaking but intriguing world of the street child.

And in future when I pull up at the red robot on a cold frosty morning and see out of the side window of my car a young waif, barefoot, clothed in tattered dirty rags, shivering, transparent thin snot from glue sniffing running from his nose, hands cupped and outstretched in pleading and a doleful look of melancholy and despair on his face, I will not be as irritated and judge as harshly as in the past. I will know and appreciate a little of what lies under the grime, I will see further than the nuisance and I will quietly understand that behind the forlorn image most probably lies a story of courage, of grit and of somebody just trying to make the best of what a cruel and unfair life has thrown at him.