

Relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in secondary school communities

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This study is especially dedicated to my mother, Maria Cornelia Botha (1957-2012).
Thank you for your years of love, your passion, support, kindness and guidance.

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ABSTRACT

School communities are supposed to be safe places for children where they can build healthy and positive relationships; protected places where children not only gain knowledge, but also learn about themselves. However, research indicates an increase in violent behaviour within school communities.

The serious nature of violence in South African schools is evident in reports of physical and sexual abuse, gang-related activities and children bringing and using weapons at schools. The violence is not limited to violence between children but also involves interschool rivalries where gang conflicts have become part of the problem.

Despite the measures taken by the DoE, violence in schools is still escalating and educators in some schools can spend more time on solving issues relating to violence than being involved in the process of effective teaching. Consequently violence in schools might become a threat to the provision of effective education for children.

Current South African research on bullying behaviour tends to follow a linear, individualistic approach as a means to understanding the phenomenon of bullying. Research conducted within the South African context tends to focus on the individual behaviour of children involved in bullying incidents with the need to address the aggressive behaviour of the bully, the need to protect the victim and describing concerns for the bystanders. The concern of such a linear approach is that research does not place enough emphasis on the relationships of members in school communities and the contexts in which bullying behaviour occurs.

To address this gap in the knowledge regarding our understanding of bullying behaviour from a relational perspective, the researcher explored the relational experiences of secondary school children who were involved in bullying incidents in three secondary school communities in South Africa. A systemic developmental approach developed by Cairns and Cairns (1991) and adopted by Atlas and Pepler (1998) as well as a complex interactive dynamics systems approach informed this study.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to efforts to find solutions to the escalation of bullying behaviour by exploring the relational experiences of children who were involved in bullying incidents in the context of secondary school communities in South Africa. It is anticipated that an exploration of the relational experiences of these children might facilitate a deeper understanding of the dynamics that emerge in the interactions between the various members in school communities and an understanding of how these interactions contribute toward the escalation in bullying behaviour.

In order to obtain a deeper understanding regarding the phenomenon of bullying, a qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to explore the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents within three secondary school communities. Within the first phase of data collection thirty three participants (between grade 8-11), who were purposely selected, completed a written assignment. The written assignment included a short essay based on their experience of a bullying incident and twenty incomplete sentences that were open-ended in nature. In the second phase of data collection the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with six of the participants who participated in the first phase of data

collection. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to ask further questions to obtain a deeper understanding regarding their relational experiences of bullying incidents in their school community. Based on the responses of the participants, three themes were identified:

(1) Relational experiences of interactions between teachers and children based on the experiences of children where they spoke about interactions that suggested reciprocal disrespect between children and teachers, incongruence between teachers and learners, teachers attempting to control the behaviour of children and lack of interest displayed in children by their teachers;

(2) Relational experiences of interactions between children that included subthemes of assertion of power to obtain status amongst peers, exclusion based on group membership, competitiveness amongst groups and violating the trust of friends;

(3) Relational experiences of interactions in conflict situations where participants described their bullying experiences and suggested that teachers display apathy in these forms of conflict situations. The participants also reported that children tend to instigate and reinforce conflict. Learners also often choose to remain silent out of fear for retaliation and that teacher-parent disputes exist regarding the managing of conflict situations between children. The relational experiences of the children assisted to inform our understanding of the interactive dynamics that underpin bullying behaviour.

In view of the findings of the study, recommendations are made for practice, policy development and suggestions for future research are also offered.

Keywords: Bullying behaviour, secondary school communities, relational perspective, systemic-developmental model, complexity perspectives, well-being perspective.

OPSOMMING

Skoolgemeenskappe is veronderstel om veilige ruimtes te wees, waarbinne kinders positiewe en gesonde verhoudings kan handhaaf; „n ruimte waarbinne hulle nie net kennis verkry nie, maar ook hulself leer ken. Huidige navorsing toon egter dat daar „n toename is in gewelddadige gedrag binne skool gemeenskappe, wat die veiligheid van kinders in skole bedreig. Die ernstige aard van geweld in Suid Afrikaanse skole word in die navorsing beskryf met spesifieke verwysing na fisiese en seksuele geweld, bende-verwante aktiwiteite en leerders wat met wapens skool toe kom. Die geweld in skole vind egter nie net plaas in die interaksie tussen leerders nie. Dit sluit ook geweld tussen leerders van verskillende skool gemeenskappe in, in gevalle waar bendes betrokke is.

Ten spyte van die pogings deur die onderwysdepartement om die problem aan te spreek, neem geweld in skole steeds toe. Onderwysers in sommige skole spandeer volgens navorsing meer tyd om insidente van geweld op te los as wat hul tyd spandeer aan effektiewe onderrig. Gevolglik bedreig die geweldsituasie in die skole die proses van effektiewe onderrig.

Huidige navorsing oor boelie-gedrag word hoofsaaklik onderneem vanuit „n liniêre, individualistiese benadering tot menslike gedrag en maak in meeste gevalle gebruik van „n kwantitatiewe benadering. Navorsing binne die Suid- Afrikaanse konteks fokus in die meeste

gevalle op die individuele gedrag van kinders, die onderskeie rolspelers in die boelie insidente gesamentlik met die behoefte om die gewelddadige gedrag van die boelie aan te spreek, die behoefte om die slagoffer te beskerm en beskryf komernisse vir die omstanders.

'n Liniêre-individualistiese benadering gee daartoe aanleiding dat navorsing dikwels nie die verhoudings tussen lede in skoolgemeenskappe en die konteks waarin boeliegedrag plaasvind genoegsaam in ag neem nie. Ten einde hierdie gaping in kennis ten opsigte van ons begrip van boeliegedrag aan te spreek het die navorser gepoog om met die studie by te dra tot „n verskuiwing van „n liniêre individuele perspektief na „n verhoudingsgebaseerde perspektief deur die verhoudingservaringe van kinders wat betrokke was by boelie insidente in 3 sekondêre skoolgemeenskappe binne die Suid-Afrikaanse konteks te ondersoek.

'n Sistemiese-ontwikkelings perspektief, ontwikkel deur Cairns en Cairns (1991) en geïmplimenteer deur Atlas en Pepler (1998), gekombineer met 'n komplekse interaktiewe dinamiese sistemiese benadering is in die studie as konseptuele raamwerk gebruik om die verhoudingservaringe van sekondêr skool leerders wat by boelie-insidente betrokke was, te verken.

Ten einde „n dieper verstaan van boelie-gedrag te verkry, is „n kwalitatiewe ondersoek onderneem met die oog op die verkenning van die verhoudingservaringe van leerders wat in boelie-insidente in sekondêre skole betrokke was. Gedurende die eerste fase van data-insameling is 33 leerders (graad8-11) doelbewus geselekteer. Die deelnemers het 'n geskrewe opdrag voltooi. Die geskrewe opdrag het bestaan uit 'n kort opstelvraag asook onvoltooide

sinne. Gedurende die tweede fase van data insameling het die navorser semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude gevoer met ses van die deelnemers. Hierdie deelnemers was ook betrokke by die eerste fase van data insameling. Die semi-gestruktureerde onderhoude het die navorser met die geleentheid gebied om verdere vrae te vra om sodoende 'n dieper verstaan te verkry rakende kinders se verhoudingservaringe van boelie insidente binne in hul skoolgemeenskap. Drie temas is op grond van deelnemers se antwoorde geïdentifiseer:

(1) Verhoudingservaringe van interaksies tussen onderwysers en kinders. Die deelnemers se ervaringe het die volgende ingesluit: wedersydse disrespek in verhoudinge; inkongruente optrede van onderwysers teenoor leerders, onderwysers wat die gedrag van kinders probeer beheer en gebrek aan belangstelling in kinders aantoon. (2) Verhoudingservaringe van interaksies tussen kinders het die volgende ingesluit; die afdwing van mag om sodoende 'n hoër status tussen maats te verkry, uitsluiting van kinders gegrond op groeplidmaatskap, kompetisie tussen groepe en die verbreking van vertroue tussen vriende. (3) In die verhoudingservaringe van interaksies binne konfliktsituasies het deelnemers die volgende aangetoon: Onderwysers tree apaties op in konfliktsituasies; kinders hits konflik aan en versterk dit; kinders bly stil, omdat hulle bang is vir vergelding en argumente ontstaan tussen onderwysers en ouers rakende die hantering van konflik. Hierdie verhoudingservaringe van kinders het verder „n dieper bewustheid gekweek rakende die interaktiewe dinamika wat boelie-gedrag onderlê. Ten slotte is daar op grond van die bevindinge aanbevelings gemaak vir praktyk, die ontwikkeling van beleid en toekomstige navorsing oor boelie-gedrag vanuit „n verhoudingsgebaseerde benadering.

Sleuteltermes: Boelie-gedrag, sekondêre skoolgemeenskappe, verhoudingsperspektief, systemiese-ontwikkelings benadering, kompleksiteit perspektiewe, welstand perspektief

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION TO THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

Schools should be safe and enabling spaces in which children have opportunities to develop their talents, obtain critical thinking and life skills, cultivate friendships, and demonstrate care and support for their peers (Burton, 2008). However, research conducted over the past ten years indicates that instead of providing safe and enabling spaces for children and educators, schools have become places where children experience fear and are at an increasing risk of being exposed to various forms of violence due to the escalation in bullying behaviour in these contexts (Burton & Leoshut, 2013; Lazarus, Khan & Johnson, 2012). This increase in bullying behaviour in schools poses serious concerns across the globe to professionals involved in these contexts and has therefore been studied extensively by various researchers over the past ten years (Anderson, 2007; Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Burton & Leoshut, 2012; De Wet, 2007; Neser et al., 2004a; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Pepler & Craig, 2007).

The extent of the problem in South Africa is evident from research conducted by De Wet (2007) on the nature and prevalence of bullying in schools in the Free State (one of the nine provinces in South Africa). The findings indicate that 83, 8 per cent of the respondents reported that bullying incidents often occur within their schools. In more recent research Tustin and Zulu (2012) found that three out of ten children who participated in their study reported that they had been victimized, while four out of ten reported being aware of a friend who has been bullied by someone.

The concerns regarding bullying behaviour are furthermore evident in media reports on various incidents of violent acts that have taken place in schools over the past five years (Wilter, 2013). These violent acts were often preceded by bullying behaviour. One particular case is the case of a South African boy who pleaded guilty to a charge of murder and three charges of attempted murder and was sentenced to 20 years imprisonment (Langer, 2009). There are many speculations regarding the possible causes that lead to this incident. One response was to blame the boy's behaviour on Satanist practices, heavy metal music and the use of dagga (Ajam, 2008; Van Wyk, 2008; Potterton, 2008). However, according to his friends and parents, he was a victim of bullying since starting school as he always was a very thin child. After his arrest, he disclosed to his parents that he felt worthless and powerless and wanted to make a statement through his acts of violence at the school. He insisted that he had no intention to kill anyone, but merely wanted to express his frustration and powerlessness and wanted to be recognised as someone (De Wet, 2011; Potterton, 2008). This case illustrates that the context in which the bullying behaviour occurs and the relationships between people in these contexts might play a significant role in deepening our understanding of bullying behaviour in South African school communities.

The purpose of this study is to contribute to efforts and to find solutions to the escalation of bullying behaviour by exploring the relational experiences of children who were involved in bullying incidents in the context of secondary school communities in South Africa. It is anticipated that an exploration of the relational experiences of these children might facilitate a deeper understanding of the dynamics that emerge in the interactions between the various members in school communities and understanding of how these interactions contribute toward the escalation in bullying behaviour.

1.2 Stating the problem

Bullying behaviour poses a major threat to the safety of children, as indicated in a comparative study on bullying behaviour in South Africa and Australia (Rossouw & Stewart, 2008). A more recent study (Tustin & Zulu, 2012), released by the youth research unit at the University of South Africa, that involved grade 8-12 children from Gauteng, confirms that cyber-bullying in particular, is on the increase in secondary schools. The study emphasised that bullying behaviour does not only have an effect on the wellbeing of victims, but also influences the wellbeing of all those who are involved in the school context where the bullying incidents occur (Tustin & Zulu, 2012). Considering the importance of wellbeing for optimal development of potential and quality of life, it is imperative that research should contribute to a deeper understanding of the problems associated with bullying behaviour (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002; Negovan, 2010; White, 2008).

Despite the fact that bullying research is considered a relatively young field (Maher, Zins & Elias, 2007), extensive research has been conducted on bullying behaviour in South African school communities. The main focus of the research has been on exploring the behaviour of the individuals involved in bullying incidents in schools coupled with ways to address the aggressive behaviour of the child who displays bullying behaviour, the protection of the child who is bullied or the concerns about the bystanders who observe bullying behaviour. Bullying behaviour is seen as a problem that prevails in school communities and is perceived as caused by individuals (Coertze & Bezuidenhout, 2013) who behave in this way because they need to dominate others, experience power and control, show how tough they are or to have fun as well as imitating behaviour of their adult role models (Anderson, 2007; Maree, 2005; Naser et al., 2004a; Smit, 2003). From this perspective, bullies are identified as

individuals who are impulsive, dominating, lacking empathy and appearing aggressive (Greeff & Grobler, 2008; De Wet, 2005; Kruger, 2010; Maree, 2005; Naser et al., 2004b). Victims are perceived as individuals who are weak, vulnerable, have a low self-esteem, and are easy targets (Anderson, 2007; Andreou, 2001; Naser et al., 2004a; Naser et al., 2004b; Parsons, 2005; Smit 2003). Based on this individualist perspective on bullying behaviour the research literature indicates that blame might be placed on either the victim (Darney, 2009; Thomson, 2012; Smit, 2003; Swart & Bredekamp, 2009), the bully (Coloroso, 2008; Naser et al., 2004a; Parsons, 2005) or the family (Bender & Emslie, 2010; Coloroso, 2008; Garret, 2003; Maree, 2005; Thomas, 2012;). Yet, no matter who is held responsible for the bullying behaviour, the person labelled as the bully, is in most instances punished in accordance with rules and procedures developed to maintain control over behaviour (De Wet, 2006; De Wet, 2007; Du Plessis & Venter, 2012; Smit, 2002; Rossouw, 2003; Rossouw & Stewart, 2008).

Pepler and Craig (2007) refer to this notion as the positivist or deficit approach to bullying. According to Kitching, Roos and Ferreira (2012), the approach is informed by the traditional modernist perspective on human behaviour. The approach is based on the principles of orderliness (Terjesen, Jacofsky, Froh & DiGuseppe, 2004) that celebrates logic, reason and calculation (Saleebey, 2001; Smyth, 2006) and applies metaphors of the machine (Morrison, 2002) when dealing with human behaviour. From this perspective human behaviour is often explained by identifying specific causes and controlled by rules and regulations in linear ways.

To steer away from the individualist, linear, causal approach, Pepler and Craig (2007) suggest the adoption of a *binocular perspective* to understand and address the problem of

bullying behaviour in a more effective way. The implication of applying a binocular perspective is that the focus shifts from the individual (either the bully or the victim) to an understanding of the interactions between the individuals, as well as the context in which the bullying behaviour unfolds. The binocular perspective is closely related to the systemic-developmental model that emphasises the relationships that exist between members in the school community, the interactions between these members and the context within which the interactions occur. Extensive research has been conducted on the relational and contextual aspects by Craig and Pepler (2007), Craig, Pepler and Atlas (2000) and Swearer and Doll (2001). The complexity perspectives on human behaviour (Stacey, 2001; Stacey, 2003; Shaw, 2002; Jörg, 2009) that perceive human behaviour as complex interactive processes of relating concurs with the systemic developmental model that the focus should rather be on relationships than on the behaviour of individuals if we intend to find solutions to human behaviour problems.

However, despite acknowledging that relationships should play a significant role in the prevalence of bullying behaviour, research on bullying behaviour in schools in both national and international contexts still mainly focuses on describing the behaviour of specific individuals labelled either as bullies, victims or bystanders, who are involved in incidents and identifying factors that contribute to bullying as well as the consequences that bullying behaviour might have.

In recent research Botha (2014) and Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2009) focus on childrens' experiences of violence in school communities and refer to relationships as an important aspect in understanding violence in schools. However, in the discussion of the

findings and the suggestions made for practice the emphasis is still mainly focussed on the individuals involved in incidents of violence, and less on the relational dimension of the violence.

To address this gap in the knowledge regarding our understanding of bullying behaviour from a relational perspective, the researcher explored the relational experiences of secondary school children who were involved in bullying incidents in three secondary school communities in South Africa. A systemic developmental approach developed by Cairns and Cairns (1991) and adopted by Atlas and Pepler (1998) as well as a complex interactive dynamics systems approach informed this study. These approaches are discussed in Chapter two of this study.

The research questions guiding this study will be:

What are the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in secondary school contexts?

How do these relational experiences inform our understanding of the role that the interactions between members of the school community play in bullying behaviour in these contexts?

1.3 Purpose and aim of the study

The purpose of this study was to enhance our understanding of bullying behaviour from a relational perspective. The aim of the research was to explore the relational

experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in selected secondary school communities in South Africa, using a qualitative phenomenological research design.

1.4 Research design and methodology

A brief overview of the research design and methodology is presented here. A comprehensive discussion of the research design and methodology is presented in chapter 4.

1.4.1 Research design

A qualitative phenomenological research design was applied in this study. Phenomenological research is based on a reality which is socially constructed and relies on personal knowledge and subjectivity (Lester, 1999). The focus of phenomenological research is on the lived experiences of individuals and the meaning they attach to their experiences (De Vos et al., 2011; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003; Creswell, 2012). The application of a phenomenological research design therefore provided the researcher with the opportunity to explore the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents with the aim of understanding the meaning that they attach to these experiences.

Qualitative research methodology allows the researcher to obtain an understanding of individuals or group experiences regarding a particular phenomenon, while also considering the context in which individuals reside (Creswell, 2012; Willig, 2008; Patton & Cochran, 2002). In this study the researcher used qualitative data gathering methods in order to obtain a deeper understanding of the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in secondary schools in South Africa.

1.4.2 Selection of participants

The research was conducted within three secondary school communities. The population included all the grade 8 to grade 11 children in the three school communities. The thirty three participants for this study were purposively selected to ensure that they had the required characteristics or attributes in order to address the particular phenomenon (De Vos et al., 2011). Prior to the selection of the participants, the researcher had an opportunity to do a short presentation on bullying behaviour to the principals at each of these schools. This presentation was done in order to obtain permission from each the school principals. During this presentation the researcher explained the purpose and nature of her research and the criteria for inclusion in the study, namely that participants should have been previously involved in bullying incidents, either as persons accused of bullying, persons identified as victims, persons identified as bystanders or as persons closely related to the aforementioned individuals.

1.4.3 Data gathering

The research data gathering process involved two phases. In the first phase participants (n=33) were given a written assignment in which they were asked to respond to the following question:

Write an essay, in which you tell about a bullying incident in school in which you were involved either as the person who instigated a conflict situation, the person referred to as a victim or as a witness of an incident where bullying took place.”

The assignment also included 20 incomplete sentences that were open-ended in nature (see Addendum E and F) to allow the participants the opportunity to present their own interpretations of particular situations from a relational perspective.

In the second phase semi-structured interviews were conducted with six participants. These participants were purposively selected to contribute towards a more in-depth understanding of the particular phenomenon. The researcher selected them based on indicators of the perspective from which they wrote about bullying incidents in their written assignment with the aim of giving voice to all three positions in bullying incidents; namely those children accused of instigating bullying behaviour, those children referred to as a victim of bullying behaviour and bystanders. In this study the sample for the individual interviews was therefore representative of those considered as victims, those who have instigated bullying incidents and those who witnessed bullying incidents. During the interviews however, the participants were not labelled according to their positions, but allowed to give their opinions on the different positions. A total of eight participants were initially selected but only six participants finally agreed to be involved in the semi-structured interviews. The interviews were recorded and transcribed in preparation for the analysis.

1.4.4 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied in the study. Thematic analysis allows the researcher to identify, analyse and report on patterns/themes that are found in the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process of thematic analysis involves various steps. In the initial process of thematic analysis, the researcher became familiar with the data by repeatedly reading through

the data. Codes were then generated from the data. During the process of coding, it was then possible to obtain an idea of the possible themes. The researcher and supervisor collaborated and worked together to identify and review the themes. It was then possible to define and name the themes. Once the themes were refined and finalised the researcher presented and discussed the findings within chapter five. By organising the raw data into sets of themes and subthemes the researcher was able to obtain a better understanding regarding the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents.

1.4.5 Trustworthiness

Crystallisation was applied to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Crystallisation is a process that includes a combination of various forms of analysis and representations of different kinds of data which in turn delivers in-depth descriptions of a particular phenomenon through which we are able to obtain an understanding of others lived experiences (Ellingson, 2009; Tracy, 2010). The ways in which crystallisation was applied will be discussed in detail in paragraph 4.7 of the study.

1.4.6 Ethical considerations

The ethical principles as endorsed by the Constitution of South Africa (1996) which protect human rights and public safety provided the basis for this research. Before conducting this study, a research proposal was submitted to an ethical review committee of the NWU in order to ensure the meeting of ethical standards, as indicated in the research literature (e.g. Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The ethical clearance number is NWU-00060-12-A. Three schools

were identified and the principals were approached to establish if they would be willing to participate in the research once permission was granted by the Department of Education.

Permission was then obtained from the manager of research in the Western Cape Department of Education (see attached letter- addendum L). Having obtained the aforesaid permission the researcher contacted the principals of the schools. After permission was obtained the researcher once again approached the principals to inform them that the application was successful and that the research process would proceed.

After the principals of the schools gave their permission the researcher collaborated with a coordinator, who was assigned to assist the researcher regarding further arrangements to conduct the study at each of the research sites. The coordinator at each school in collaboration with senior staff members identified possible participants for the study, based on the information that they had on incidents that took place over a one-year period prior to the study. The coordinators were asked to refrain from labelling these children as bullies, victims or bystanders. They were merely invited to attend an information session based on the fact that they have been involved in reported incidents in their contexts.

In order to obtain permission from parents and assent from children these parties were both informed in writing of the rationale, aim and possible contribution of the study. Once parents or caregiver and children were clearly informed about the project, the parents were asked to sign permission for the children to participate and following that the children were asked to sign an assent form.

The participants in the study were protected against possible harm by asking the participants not to indicate their specific position in the bullying incidents. The researcher worked with the principal and the senior management teams in each school to ensure that the participants were not exposed to situations that could endanger them. Participants who needed support based on their involvement in the research were referred to professionals who could assist them. The researcher also informed the Education Support Staff of the two districts in which the research took place, of the nature and extent of the study.

The parents and the children (participants) were informed that participation was voluntary and that they were allowed to withdraw from the study at any stage without being penalised or discriminated against in any way. School principals and teachers involved with these children were informed accordingly to ensure that they did not place any pressure on children to participate and respect children's decisions not to participate.

Anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. The data they provided was thus not linked to their names. Each participant was allocated a number that was used to refer to their statements.

Confidentiality was ensured by only sharing the raw data with the supervisor. The researcher also refrained from discussing the data with the staff at the school. The data was also kept safe and no one apart from the researcher had access to the data (written assignments, recordings and transcripts). The hard copies of the qualitative questionnaires and external hard drive with all the raw data were safely stored at the CCYF while the research was in progress. Access could only be obtained with a password that was known to

the researcher and the supervisor. On completion of the study the data was stored at the CCYF where it will be kept in a safe for seven years.

With regards to the dissemination of the results, feedback sessions will be held with the school management team at each of the school communities. The school management team will be informed about the findings of the study as discussed in chapter five of the study, as well as the recommendations made by the researcher.

1.5 Key terms

➤ Bullying

Bullying is most commonly referred to as a form of aggression, used by one or more children to cause harm toward another child, who has difficulty in defending himself (Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005). Olweus (1993) emphasises that bullying involves a power imbalance and includes negative behaviours inflicted upon another person, repeatedly and over a period of time. Atlas and Pepler (1998) describe bullying as an interaction that occurs between two or more individuals within a specific social ecological context.

➤ Secondary school

In South Africa secondary schools are schools that accommodate children between grades 8-12. Grade 7-9 is known as the senior phase and grade 10-12 is known as the FET (further education training) phase. School attendance is compulsory up until grade 9 (or 15

years of age) and if children choose to they can continue with the FET phase. On successful completion of FET phase, children obtain a matriculation (grade 12) certificate.

➤ **Schools as communities**

Schools as communities refer to the idea that schools should be perceived as places that bind teachers and children in special ways and where values and ideals are shared. Sergiovanni (1994) states that by referring to schools as communities means to make a shift from a collection of „I"s" to a collective „we". This collective „we" contributes toward a sense of belonging, place and identity. This need to belong has been identified as fundamental in by Baumeister and Leary (1995) and facilitates connectedness between members in the school community, making our lives more significant and meaningful. Strike (2000) concurs that schools as communities contribute toward a sense of belonging and rootedness. Schools as communities further contribute toward developing socially beneficial characteristics such as loyalty, trust and mutual attachment.

➤ **Wellbeing**

Wellbeing is described by Evans and Prilleltensky (2007) as a positive state of affairs of individuals and communities in which their personal, relational and collective needs are fulfilled. Furthermore, the wellbeing of every individual is highly dependent on his or her relationships and the community in which the person resides (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2005). Nakamura (2000) agrees, stating that health and wellbeing does not merely refer to physical and mental wellness, but also include interpersonal relationships and the nature thereof. Nakamura (2000) refers to wellness as a continuous process of self-renewal toward obtaining an exciting, creative and fulfilling life. The author further refers to various dimensions of

wellness which includes social, spiritual, intellectual, emotional, psychosocial and physical wellness. These dimensions of wellness are closely linked with the levels of well-being described by Evans and Prilleltensky (2007).

➤ **Complexity of human behaviour**

Complexity refers to those theories that focus on the complexity of human interaction and the associated interactive dynamics that emerge in these interactions. By exploring human interaction through the lens of complexity theories, we become aware that human behaviour is not linear, but rather involves intricate processes in which particular dynamics emerge from our interactions with one another.

CHAPTER 2

BULLYING BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES: LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter, current literature on bullying behaviour in schools is discussed with the aim of indicating current tendencies in the research as well as the specific gap in the knowledge that is addressed in this study. To start off, bullying behaviour is positioned within the context of violence in schools. This is followed by a discussion of the various forms of bullying, the characteristics of individuals involved in bullying, the factors contributing toward bullying, gender similarities and differences in bullying as well as the consequences of bullying, as presented in the current research literature. Finally current research on bullying is discussed critically with specific reference to the shortcomings regarding the ways in which bullying behaviour is perceived in the research literature.

2.2 Bullying behaviour in the context of violence

Schools are supposed to be safe spaces for children where they can develop pro-social behaviours to develop and maintain friendships; protected places where they not only gain knowledge, but also learn about themselves. However, recent research indicates an escalation in violent behaviour in schools (Botha, 2014; Burton & Leoshut, 2013; Mncube & Harber, 2012; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). Despite the measures taken by the DoE, violence in schools is still escalating and educators in some schools can spend more time on solving issues related to violence than being involved in the process of effective teaching. Consequently

violence in schools might become a threat to the provision of effective education for children (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). The serious nature of violence in South African schools is evident in reports of physical and sexual abuse, gang-related activities and the possession of weapons at schools. The violence is not limited to violence between children but also involves interschool rivalries where gang conflicts have become part of the problem (Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; SACE, 2011).

Various studies have been conducted within the South African context pertaining to violence and the impact thereof in school contexts (Botha, 2014; Burton & Leoshut, 2013; McNube & Harber, 2013; Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009). The study conducted by Botha (2014) focused on children's experiences of relational aggression in an attempt to further enhance our understanding of how relational aggression negatively impedes on the social and academic development of children and influences their well-being. In another study Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2009) conducted a study based on the way aggression was experienced within secondary school communities and how this influenced the mental health of children. The above-mentioned authors attempt to provide descriptions of violence in terms of interpersonal relationships, but still place the emphasis on the role of the individual. The study conducted by Botha (2014) refers to key terms such as „power“ and „control“ as aspects that are related to the interactive dynamics created between children. However, in the findings the focus are on „factors“ contributing toward the phenomenon of bullying rather than on the interactive dynamics between children as key to understanding this phenomenon. Future strategies suggested by these authors seem to focus mainly on the individual and the improvement of individual skills and not so much on the relationships between children and between children and teachers that contribute toward these experiences.

Furthermore violence between the educators and children is reported in the research literature. A study conducted by Burton and Leoshut (2013) indicated that many educators still use corporal punishment as a means of disciplining children. In fact the use of corporal punishment has increased since 2008 in Mpumalanga, Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and the Western Cape up until 2012. The use of corporal punishment provides children with the idea that using force, either emotional or physical is an acceptable way of dealing with particular situations (Burton & Leoshut, 2013; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013). The situation causes concern since educators are considered to be role-models for children in developing pro-social and non-violent behaviour in school contexts and by applying corporal punishment create the impression that violence might be an acceptable way to address problems.

Bullying is considered as a form of violence, since both violence and bullying involve infliction of harm on another individual(s) and includes the use of power. The definition of bullying that was formulated by Olweus in 1991 is still applied in recent literature to conceptualise the term (Department of Education, 2012; Ncontsa & Shumba, 2013; Smokowski & Kopasz, 2005; Swart & Bredekamp, 2009). Olweus (1991) defines bullying as a form of interaction, whereby the dominant individual (the „bully“) repeatedly exhibits aggressive behaviour with the intention to cause distress or harm towards the less dominant individual who is then referred to as the „victim“. The aggressive behaviour inflicted on the other (less dominant individual), can be physical or non-physical in nature, last for a period of time and is recurrent. This behaviour often occurs without apparent provocation and is characterized by an imbalance of power.

The imbalance of power, according to research conducted by Pepler and Craig (2007) can be derived from a physical advantage (such as height, weight and strength), social advantage, (e.g. teacher compared to a student), higher social status (popular versus non-popular), systemic power (e.g. racial or cultural groups, disability, economic disadvantage, gender) or power can be obtained by knowing the other person's vulnerabilities (e.g. obesity, sexual orientation, family background, learning problem) and using this knowledge to cause harm.

The intertwined nature of violence, aggression and bullying seems evident, yet in the literature on bullying behaviour the focus remains on classifications of various forms of bullying behaviour instead of exploring the interactive dynamics that exist within these contexts that allows for bullying behaviour to unfold.

2.3 Classifying various forms of bullying behaviour

In this paragraph various forms of bullying behaviour identified in the research literature is distinguished. In table 2.1 below an overview of the various forms are presented to indicate main and subcategories that are distinguished in the literature.

DIRECT/ PHYSICAL	INDIRECT/NON-PHYSICAL		
Physical bullying Hitting	Verbal bullying Spreading rumours Gossip Teasing	Non-verbal/ social bullying Exclusion Withholding	Cyber bullying Abusive telephone calls, text messages and emails.

Pushing Spitting	Threats of violence Abusive telephone calls	friendships Damaging of property Making mean faces Rude gestures	Threatening messages on social communication websites such as Facebook and Twitter.
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Table 2.1 Forms of bullying

Bullying is classified in the research literature as either direct (physical) or indirect (non-physical). In the case of direct bullying (physical bullying) behaviour, harm is openly directed towards the victim in the form of hitting, pushing, spitting, shoving or taking the victim's belongings (Anderson, 2007; Crick, 1996; Prinstein, Boergers & Vernberg, 2001). Researchers indicate that physical bullying is the most blatant form of bullying and often causes physical harm and injuries (Neser et al., 2004a; Smit, 2003; Sullivan, Cleary & Sullivan, 2004). Rivkin (2013) adds that taking or damaging the belongings of another child is also considered as a form of physical bullying and holds serious consequences for the victimized child.

Indirect bullying refers to „non-physical bullying“ which includes verbal as well as non-verbal bullying (Sullivan, 2004). Non-physical bullying is more subtle and refers to behaviour such as spreading rumours, gossiping, deliberate exclusion or withholding friendships (Anderson, 2007; Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002; De Wet, 2006; Liang, Flisher & Lombard, 2007; van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2009). Verbal bullying as a form of non-physical bullying refers to teasing, general threats of violence and intimidation, while non-verbal bullying includes damaging the property of others, making rude gestures or making mean faces.

Collins et al. (2004), Coloroso (2003) and Lee (2004) refer to verbal bullying as the type which includes teasing, threats and name calling. Verbal bullying is often directed towards vulnerable groups such as ethnic groups, children of different sexual orientation and people with learning difficulties (Craig & Pepler, 2007; Garret, 2003; Whitted & Dupper, 2005; Sullivan et al., 2004). This form of bullying also appears to be common amongst both boys and girls whereas physical bullying seems to be more prevalent amongst boys (Anderson, 2007; De Wet, 2007; Garret, 2003; Neser et al., 2004).

A recent form of bullying that is reported to be on the increase is „cyber bullying“ (Tustin & Zulu, 2012). Cyber bullying, according to Lee (2004) is a form of indirect bullying in that the child who is being victimized might not know the perpetrator. Cyber bullying includes abusive phone calls, text messages, e-mails and threatening messages on social communication websites such as Facebook and Twitter (Tustin & Zulu, 2012; Coloroso, 2003; Lee, 2004).

Social bullying includes, withholding friendships, deliberate exclusion, damaging friendships, spreading rumours and gossiping. It is often perceived as an indirect form of bullying due to its subtleness and the covert nature thereof (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Crick, 1996; Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002; O'Moore & Minton, 2004). Sullivan et al. (2004) on the other hand refers to social bullying as *nonverbal bullying* and further distinguishes between *direct nonverbal bullying* and *indirect nonverbal bullying*. Direct nonverbal bullying includes gestures and making faces which is often perceived as not that serious, but can in fact be used as a way to maintain power and control. Indirect nonverbal bullying includes social exclusion, ignoring and isolating which is then also known as social or relational bullying. According to Crick (1996) and Atlas and Pepler (1998), cases of relational bullying are often dismissed by the teachers due to its covert nature. Teachers do not always pick up on these subtle behaviours therefore it is less likely that teachers will intervene.

The research literature does not present a clear classification of bullying. Researchers rather use broad terms to classify bullying behaviour. For example, some authors distinguish between direct and indirect bullying whereas others refer to indirect bullying as relational bullying or even refer to social bullying as relational bullying. Sullivan et al. (2004) refers to direct nonverbal and indirect nonverbal bullying whereas other authors refer to direct and indirect nonverbal bullying as social bullying (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Crick, 1996; Crick, Grotpeter & Bigbee, 2002; O'Moore & Minton, 2004). The lack of clear classifications of bullying might indicate that due to the complex nature a classification might be too linear to describe the complexity of the phenomenon.

The tendency in current literature to refer to social bullying as relational bullying (Hemphill et al., 2012; O' Moore & Minton, 2004; Neser et al., 2004; Parsons, 2005) is questioned, as it seems that bullying behaviour is per se relational. The implication of understanding bullying as relational implies that when studying the phenomenon, research in the South African context needs to shift away from a linear, causal perspective. A move towards a relational perspective as suggested in international research on bullying behaviour (Rodkin, Farmer, Pearl & Van Acker, 2000) needs to be adopted if we attend to address the prevailing problems. This perspective considers the interactions between members in the school community as well as the social networks in which they are embedded as suggested by the binocular perspective should be pursued.

2.4 Gender and bullying behaviour

Extensive research has been conducted to explore the role of gender in association with various kinds of bullying behaviour. According to Garret, (2003), there seems to be a general consensus amongst researchers that, although both boys and girls engage in bullying behaviour, they experience it differently. Boys are more prone to engage in physical aggression whereas girls tend to engage in indirect bullying.

A study conducted by Naser et al. (2004a), found that boys are more likely to engage in physical aggression whereas girls are more likely to participate in relational aggression such as gossiping, spreading rumours and excluding peers. Other research supports these findings, by indicating that boys are more prone to physical aggression, especially within primary school and as boys get older they tend to engage in other forms of bullying, such as verbal bullying. Girls on the other hand are less involved in physical bullying and more often engage in verbal and non-verbal bullying (De Wet, 2005; Hemphill et al., 2012; O' Moore & Minton, 2004; Naser et al., 2004a; Parsons, 2005). According to Parsons (2005) and Swart and Bredekamp (2009) girls tend to spread rumours, exclude others and gossip about them. Being popular is critical amongst girls and since friendships determine popularity, exclusion by friends often leads to alienation. It is known that the more friends you appear to have, the more popular you become. This popularity is associated with independence and power and being in the „in-crowd“ further enhances the girls' self-esteem and perhaps even safety against any threats.

Although most of the current literature indicates that boys are more likely to participate in physical aggression and girls in verbal and non-verbal bullying, recent studies by Kruger (2010) as well as Seals and Young (2003) have indicated otherwise. These studies found that both boys and girls are likely to participate in physical bullying using direct physical tactics such as hitting and shoving. Boys tend to engage in physical bullying, but as they get older they are also more likely to participate in verbal and non-verbal bullying (Greeff & Grobler, 2008; Maree, 2005; Naser et al., 2004a; Naser et al., 2004b). Within the classroom setting, Atlas and Pepler (1998) found that both boys and girls are equally involved in bully behaviour. Another similarity is that both boys and girls tend to engage in group bullying (Darney, 2009; Kruger, 2010; Naser et al., 2004a).

Research conducted by Rigby (2002) and Salmivalli (2010) suggests that group bullying provides a different angle to the phenomenon of bullying. Usually these groups include a hierarchical structure in which there would be a leader and the rest of the group members act as the „assistants“ of the leader. This is often the case with boys; while girls take on the role of a bystander or defender. Members in the group tend to reinforce bullying by supporting and encouraging the leader of the group to target a specific individual. By acting in a group, there appears to be greater collective power and members use this power to intimidate others and to create fear amongst other peers in the school (Darney, 2009; Rigby, 2002; Salmivalli, 2010). In terms of whether bullies tend to operate in groups, or solo, it appears to vary from school to school. Victimised boys more often point to an individual as the bully, but quite often the bully has a group of supporters who help to sustain the behaviour (Oyaziwo et al., 2008). There is a tendency for girls to report being bullied more by groups (Rigby, 1997).

Although the research literature emphasises the role of gender in bullying it is important to note that irrespective of what gender people are, power seems to play a significant role in their bullying behaviour. Focussing on the interactions between people rather than on their gender in our understanding of bullying behaviour might therefore prevent the danger of stereotyping boys as physical bullies and girls as verbal bullies.

2.5 Factors that contribute to bullying behaviour

The identification of factors, although considered as a part of a causal, linear approach to address bullying behaviour from a complex dynamic systems perspective, is considered valuable in our understanding of the phenomenon and will therefore be discussed extensively. A large number of studies in the research literature in various sub-disciplines within Education, including educational law (De Wet, 2003; Oosthuizen, Rossouw & De Wet, 2004; Rossouw, 2003; Smit, 2009) and educational psychology (Darney, 2009; Kruger, 2010; Timm & Blokland, 2011), explore possible factors that may contribute to bullying behaviour in school communities. These factors were mainly identified by applying quantitative methodologies associated with the positivist approach that holds the assumption that there is an objective reality which can be observed and measured (Creswell, 2012; De Vos et al., 2005; Macdonald & Swart, 2004; Quigg, 2011).

For the purpose of this discussion the researcher distinguishes between factors associated with individuals and factors associated with the contexts in which the bullying behaviour occurs.

2.5.1 Displaying specific personal traits

The research literature considers personal traits as factors which contribute to bullying behaviour. Personal traits are the qualities or characteristics of a person. According to Matthews, Deary and Whiteman (2003), traits hold two key assumptions: Firstly, the personality traits of a person are stable over time, which implies that there is a core consistency regarding an individual's personality which is often referred to as the „true nature“ of a person. Secondly, traits directly influence behaviour. Traits are considered habitual patterns of emotion, temperament and emotion. In the current research literature, a distinction is made between traits of those referred to as victims and those referred to as bullies.

➤ Personality traits of victims

Research conducted on bullying behaviour suggests that children who are shy and quiet might be perceived as having a „weird“ personality and are weak and therefore unable to stand up for themselves, which then makes them easier targets for bullies (Darney, 2009; Thomas, 2012; Smit, 2003; Swart & Bredekamp; 2009). According to Neser et al. (2004a), perpetrators are aware that those who are more sensitive and vulnerable than others make easier targets. Garret (2003) agrees and states that the victims may lack confidence to take action and are more likely to be bullied. The child may be different from others, whether it is by race, size or physical appearance, increasing the likelihood of the child being victimized.

➤ Personality traits of bullies

In a study by Parsons (2005) and Olivier (2012), the following personality traits were associated with bullies: They often misunderstand peer interactions and find it difficult to control the violent impulses. Children that engage in bullying behaviour do not necessarily experience guilt or shame when bullying another child, but instead feel that their actions can

be justified, as a normal reaction to a perceived threat or provocation. Protogerou and Flisher (2012), for example, describe children labelled as „bullies“ as having a hot-tempered, domineering and impulsive nature. Children that bully others are furthermore described as tough and hostile; disobedient to rules and initiators of aggressive behaviour. They tend to blame others for their actions and show little sympathy towards the feelings and rights of others (Coloroso, 2008; Parsons, 2005; Olivier, 2012).

2.5.2 Being a member of specific target groups

Various groups that are considered easy targets have been identified in the research literature (Darney, 2009; Department of Basic Education, 2012; Naser et al., 2003; Sullivan et al., 2004). The following target groups are clearly distinguished in the research literature:

➤ Race and Ethnic groups

In a recent document provided by Department of Basic Education (2012) as well as in research conducted by Greeff (2004) children may be targeted because of their race and ethnicity. These groups are particularly targeted in situations where their specific ethnic group is a minority group in the context. They are most often picked on because of difference in skin colour, language, physical appearance and/ or different values or belief systems that they may have.

➤ Special needs groups

Those who are noted because of physical appearance as in the case of children with cerebral palsy, Down syndrome or psychological differences as in the case of children with Autism, Asperger's Syndrome or other mild mental disabilities are more at risk to be

bullied (Darney, 2009; Department of Basic Education, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2004). Due to the problems that they experience these children might not be able to act assertively and therefore became the targets of children who seek power over others.

➤ Groups with a homosexual orientation

Children with a perceived or actual homosexual orientation often get singled out and bullied. The targeting of these groups is referred to as homophobic bullying (Birkett, Espelage & Koenig, 2009; Darney, 2009; Department of Basic Education, 2012; Sullivan et al., 2004).

2.5.3 Exposure to violence in the home environment

Literature indicates that violence in the home environment might contribute to bullying behaviour in children (Geffner, Loring & Young, 2000; Maree, 2005). According to Parsons (2005), bullying behaviour can be learned in a number of ways; children can either be bullied by parents; children can witness aggressive and violent behaviour in their families or children can be rewarded for displaying aggressive behaviours in their families.

The correlation between learned bullying and parenting styles is also indicated in other research. Coloroso, (2008), Thomas; (2012) and Sullivan (2000) found that the use of physical punishment combined with inconsistent or overindulgent parenting contributes to the bullying behaviour in children. Research suggests that bullies are shaped within the home environment where bullying behaviour occurs whilst parents show little affection and attention towards the child and is often associated with an authoritarian parenting style (Darney, 2009; Garret, 2003; Bender & Emslie, 2010; Maree, 2005). It is important to note that even in contexts where parents are involved with their children, the display of bullying

behaviour and physical punishment can lead to the development of bullying behaviour in their children.

Neser et al. (2004b) found that children who tend to bully usually have a history of abuse, where they have been abused or bullied themselves. This behaviour is then projected at school to gain a sense of power and control. Research furthermore suggests that children exposed to bullying behaviour within the home are taught that using aggressive and violent behaviours are effective in attaining their goal (Bender & Emslie, 2010; Coloroso, 2008; Garret, 2003; Maree, 2005; Thomas, 2012).

2.5.4 Exposure to violence in the community

The socio-ecological contexts in which children grew up plays a significant role in the way in which they make sense of their experiences. Research, for example, suggests that children who are exposed to violent acts in their immediate environments may perceive violence as an acceptable way of dealing with other people (Beane, 1999; Maree, 2005; Greeff & Grobler, 2008; Myburgh & Poggenpoel, 2009). Furthermore, children who are exposed to violence on a regular basis learn that violence is an acceptable way of operating in the world. Therefore, they tend to use proactive aggression such as bullying because of the positive associations with violence (Camodeca & Goossens, 2005). One implication of the high crime levels in South Africa is that children who are exposed to such violent acts, whether directly or indirectly learn that it is an effective tool in gaining control over other people (Leoschut & Burton, 2006; Ward et al., 2007).

2.5.5 The role of supervision in the exposure to violence in schools

The research literature indicates an association between the locations where bullying takes place and the opportunities available to engage in bully behaviour. Based on research conducted on where bullying behaviour occurs most often, it was evident that the lack of adult supervision might be a possible reason why bullying behaviour occurs more often in certain spaces in the school (Beane, 1999; Botha, 2014). Their findings concur with a study conducted by Atlas, Craig and Pepler (2000), indicating that direct bullying most often takes place on the playground. Possible reasons for these occurrences are that there is less adult supervision on the playground; the activity levels of children are high and behaviour is unstructured. Craig, Pepler and Atlas (2000) argue that playgrounds are conducive environments for others to observe bullying and can therefore reinforce aggressive behaviours in school communities. The study specifically reported that children, who are not usually aggressive, may appear unusually aggressive on the playground. According to Olweus (1991), the high arousal levels on the playground from observing bully behaviour may lead to children who are not usually perceived as aggressive participating in bullying behaviour as well. Therefore, research should be conducted to understand the dynamics created within these contexts as it plays a role in the emergence of bullying behaviour.

2.5.6 Reflecting on the identification of factors contributing to bullying behaviour

The research conducted on the factors that contribute to bullying behaviour assist our understanding of possible causes of bullying behaviour. The research on 'factors' has mainly been conducted from a positivist approach, and therefore mainly used quantitative methods

such as questionnaires and surveys to establish factors (Neser et al., 2004a; De Wet, 2005; 2007; Greeff & Grobler, 2008; Ward et al., 2007; Rigbee, 2005; Shetgiri et al., 2012). In most instances causal links are made between the individual and event (Neser et al., 2004a; Pepler & Craig, 2007; Quigg, 2011). From this perspective blame is either placed on the victim, the bully or the family (MacDonald & Swart, 2004).

Although the individual characteristics of these children are important in understanding bully behaviour, the question is whether the labels that are given to these children do not constrain the way in which we seek solutions to the problem of bullying behaviour in schools. According to Pepler and Craig (2007), labelling victims and bullies is based on a linear perspective that perceive people either as bullies or victims, instead of considering the possibility that all people (children) are either at times bullies or victims.

Instead of describing bullying according to a broad array of factors, we ought to consider that bullying and the reasons for bullying are a part of a more complex process. This process involves a school community in which there is continuous interaction between members in the school community. Members make meaning of the experiences according to their capacity to respond and through these interactions they shape and are being shaped (Stacey, 2003; Stacey, 2007; Jörg, 2009). Despite the characteristics that children may display that make them more vulnerable, the essence lies within the way in which members respond to one another. With regard to bullying behaviour, members tend to respond negatively to one another which in turn creates a disabling dynamic. This disabling dynamic allows for bullying to unfold and to persist within school communities.

2.6 Consequences of bullying behaviour

Extensive research has been conducted over the past 10 years on the negative academic, social, emotional and psychological consequences that bullying behaviour holds for all involved (Beane, 1999; Coloroso, 2008; Craig, Henderson & Murphy, 2000; Darney, 2009; Thomas, 2012). For the purpose of this discussion, the consequences for victims, bullies and bystanders will be presented separately as presented in the research literature.

2.6.1 Consequences for children identified as victims

In some contexts bullying behaviour might be considered as a „normal“, part of growing up. The concern is that, due to such an interpretation bullying behaviour might be tolerated with the consequence that victims remain silent and in turn, become more isolated and alone (Coloroso, 2003; De Wet, 2007; Parson, 2005). Joyce (2013) states that victims tend to remain silent, due to fear of continuous victimization. Children who are being bullied therefore have no voice which in turn leads to various other negative consequences such as considering the school as an unsafe place.

In cases where a child is repeatedly bullied, the child learns to consider the school as an unsafe place and can possibly carry this same kind of message into the wider community (Sullivan et al., 2004). The child becomes more withdrawn and develops a fear of going to school in case another bullying incident occurs (Anderson, 2007; Darney, 2009; De Wet, 2005; Garret, 2003; Woods, Done & Kalsi, 2009). Victims of bullying therefore, often become more isolated, feel humiliated, have fewer friendships and in turn, develop feelings of

worthlessness and loneliness (Anderson, 2007; Darney, 2009; Garret, 2003; Hirsch, 2012; Naser et al., 2004a; Sullivan, 2004).

According to a study conducted by Swart and Bredekamp (2009), girls who were victimized, reported that they felt embarrassed, irritated, powerless and insignificant. One of the respondents in their study described that she felt like a boxing bag and at the same time hopeless, because she couldn't hit back. The feeling of powerlessness seems to be common amongst children who are constantly being bullied. Seeing that victimized children remain silent out of fear of retaliation and are too scared to stand up for themselves it is likely that they will experience feelings of powerlessness. In turn, these victimized children feel ashamed and embarrassed which then also affects the personal well-being of children. For example, Beane (1999) and Woods et al. (2009) state that children exposed to bullying behaviour tend to suffer from low self-esteem, depression, humiliation and shame, excessive feelings of isolation and aloneness as well as being socially withdrawn.

The struggle of victims and having to cope with all these negative feelings about themselves, Whitted and Dupper (2005) found that victimized children are likely to experience decreased academic performance. Children struggle to concentrate, they remain absent from school (out of the fear of being bullied again) or tend to avoid certain school activities which then influences their academics.

2.6.2 Consequences for children identified as bystanders

According to Atlas and Pepler (1998), observing bullying may create tension, discomfort and anxiety amongst peer groups. The anxiety and discomfort that bystanders experience stems from not knowing how to handle the situation. Research conducted by Darney (2009) and Whitted and Dupper (2005) agrees, stating that witnesses of bullying can experience frustration, guilt, fear as well as loss of control as they are not always sure of how to deal with bullying behaviour.

Research conducted by Atlas and Pepler (1998) state that children who are bystanders may become involved in bullying behaviours as they fear that they will be the next victim. Research conducted by Townsend et al. (2008) concurs with these findings that children are reluctant to report bullying due to the fear of being victimized. In order to protect themselves, children feel forced to join in the bullying which then decreases their chances of becoming a target of bullying behaviour. There seems to be the impression amongst children that bullying involves „survival of the fittest“ and therefore children who are bystanders participate in bullying as a means to „survive“ (i.e., not becoming a target) (Salmivalli, 2010; Rigbee, 2002). Townsend et al. (2008) further argues that in some cases, children empathise less with the child who is being bullied and participate in the bullying. According to Beane (1999) children who often witness cases of bullying can respond in the same way that many of the victims to do in as far as they will attempt to develop physical symptoms such as headaches and stomach aches in order to handle the stress. Chances are that their academic performance can also be influenced, because they focus more on how to avoid being the next target instead of focusing on academic tasks (Whitted & Dupper, 2005). Bystanders of bullying may also come to believe that the school is not a safe place (Whitted & Dupper, 2005).

2.6.3 Consequences for children identified as bullies

Children who bully are often characterized as being aggressive, impulsive, hostile and lack appropriate social skills. Based on these traits of bullies, research indicates that children who bully run the risk of experiencing further emotional and social problems such as experiencing peer rejection, low self-esteem and sometimes depression in the long term (O'Brennan, Bradshaw & Sawyer, 2008; Smith et al., 2012). According to Smokowski and Kopasz (2005) children who bully often underachieve in their school academics and in their later years they perform under average in employment settings.

Garret (2003) states that children who bully engage in more anti-social behaviour and that bullying can contribute to more violent behaviour as they get older and become adults. Studies also argue that children who bullied in their earlier years are more likely to be aggressive towards their spouse and to use more punitive approaches when it comes to disciplining their children (De Wet, 2007). Coloroso (2003) supports this argument, stating that children who bully are likely to bully their own children, are at increased risk of failing in interpersonal relationships, losing jobs and possibly ending up in jail. Bullies may find it difficult to cope, manage their emotions and struggle to communicate effectively, all of which are essential in order to develop healthy relationships. Without successful intervention, children who bully others may fall short of appropriate emotional growth and fail to develop empathy (Darney, 2009).

2.7 Challenges relating to current practices to address bullying behaviour in schools

According to the research literature, an authoritarian culture currently prevails in most schools. An *authoritarian culture* is depicted by conflicted power relations, autocratic structures and procedures and hierarchical channels of communication. A study conducted by Macdonald and Swart (2004) shows that the conflicting culture is evident in an overriding

authoritarian ethos, applied in a bid to remain in control, and therefore prohibiting schools from implementing democratic procedures effectively.

An authoritarian culture is evident in the way bullying behaviour is dealt with in schools. The Western Cape Education Department has for example, implemented a zero-tolerance approach and have developed an „Abuse no more“ policy. The concern about this policy is that it creates a picture of the alleged offender as being a criminal and needs to be punished for his/her actions (WCED, 2005). Based on the seriousness of misconduct, the so-called „bully“ may be suspended by the governing body of the school (Minister of Education, 2005). If the learner is found guilty of serious misconduct, the Head of Department may expel the learner from the school. Violence (and bullying as a form of violence) is considered to count as abuse and therefore the „victim“ can be allowed to open a criminal case against the alleged offender. There is also emphasis placed on the codes of conduct, which state that it is the educators“ responsibility to take the necessary steps to ensure the safety of children (De Wet, 2006).

By taking an authoritarian stance, bullying is unwittingly condoned in schools which are then perceived as unsafe environments due to the bullying that occur in these contexts. Consequently, such a culture clearly prevents schools from adopting more positive, collaborative and creative approaches to solving problems relating to bullying.

Another challenge is a lack of consensus on how to deal with bullying behaviour. The lack of consensus seemingly contributes toward some sense of **confusion regarding the ethos of schools**. Due to the lack of consensus of how bullying behaviour should be

approached and dealt with Sullivan (2004) states that there is not a shared understanding amongst educators, children and parents of what bullying is. There is also not a shared understanding regarding the rules and strategies to address incidents of bullying and there is confusion regarding the procedures that need to be followed in a case of a bullying incident. Seeing that there does not seem to be consensus amongst members in school communities regarding the way in which bullying behaviour should be dealt with, some controversy appears to exist whereby school staff blames the parents for not implementing appropriate discipline in the home.

Furthermore, according to Macdonald and Swart (2004) there appears to be conflicting messages regarding what schools say they are doing and what members are experiencing. These conflicting messages are evident in documents of policy on discipline. The policy documents, on the one hand focuses on the punishment of children and on the other hand, the documents attempt to acknowledge the principles of humanistic values.

Rossouw (2003) states that decline in discipline might be due to the strong emphasis on human rights. Some educators appear to put the blame on the government because of the prohibition of corporal punishment. They feel that corporal punishment is the only way to discipline children and that they can't obtain respect in any other way (Rossouw, 2003). In a study conducted by Rossouw and Stewart (2008), an educator admitted to the use of corporal punishment, stating that it is the only way to maintain order.

In addition to the confusion, a study conducted by Venter and Du Plessis (2012), showed that 66% of the teachers reported that they do not feel equipped enough to deal with bullying incidents. These teachers reported that they require training and assistance regarding how to handle bullying incidents. Teachers also felt that it is important to understand what drives bullying behaviour and why children bully in order to address this problem successfully. Teachers lack the skills to identify and intervene in bullying incidents, especially when it comes to covert forms of bullying (Anderson, 2007). In a study conducted by De Wet (2007) which focused on educators perceptions of bullying behaviour, some participants reported that they ignored incidents of bullying. Clearly, teachers feel insecure regarding how to handle issues of bullying and thus this is possibly the reason why they ignore such incidents.

The participants in the study conducted by Thomas (2012) reported that teachers and parents do not always understand bullying, therefore they don't feel safe to disclose when bullying occurred. However, they do agree that a parent or teacher should know when a child is being victimized, because they are the ones that can do something about it.

In another study, by Swart and Bredekamp, (2009) participants provided similar responses, stating that they want the support from teachers, but that it would be more helpful if teachers understand bullying, especially indirect bullying. These children specifically stated that teachers and parents need to be capable of listening and providing support.

It goes without saying, that there is clearly a problem in how bullying behaviours are addressed at schools. The lack of consensus amongst school members regarding how bully

behaviour should be approached and dealt with raises concern within the South African school communities. By law, schools authorities are required to provide children with a safe environment, therefore any episodes of misconduct (such as bullying) should be reported and disciplinary steps should be taken. Current literature strongly emphasises policies and codes of conduct as a means of handling bullying problems (De Wet, 2006; De Wet, 2007; Venter & Du Plessis, 2012; Smit, 2002; Rossouw, 2003; Rossouw & Stewart, 2008), therefore mainly focusing on the macrosystem, instead of focusing on the parties involved (microsystem).

2.8 Summary

Research on bullying behaviour in the South African school context is mainly quantitative in nature focused on describing the behaviour of individuals labelled as bullies, victims or bystanders; the identification of factors and the consequences of bullying behaviour. The research has also acknowledged that different environments that are likely to contribute to the unfolding of bullying behaviour. For example, research indicates that children who come from violent communities are likely to bully at school.

However, research within the South African school context does not sufficiently attend to the role that the interactions between the members of the school community play in the occurrence of bullying behaviour in these contexts. The work of Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2009) on aggression in schools refers to childrens' interpersonal experiences of aggression, but it appears to lack depth in terms of the interactive dynamics that are created within these interactions. Furthermore, the suggestions that are made are based on improving individual skills instead of proposing a relationship-focused approach as a means to deal with conflict situations.

It is only within the international context that research has a more qualitative nature and specifically explored the social networks and interactions of children that may contribute toward the unfolding of bullying behaviour (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Craig, Pepler & Atlas, 2000; Pepler & Craig, 2007; Vargas, 2011).

The contribution of both qualitative and quantitative research is acknowledged. However as indicated research in the South African contexts need to shift towards a relational approach if we intend to find solutions to the current challenges. The focus in this study therefore shifts to the interactions between the members of the school communities as experienced by children who were involved in bullying incidents either as the person accused of bullying, the person identified as a victim or the person identified as the bystander of bullying behaviour.

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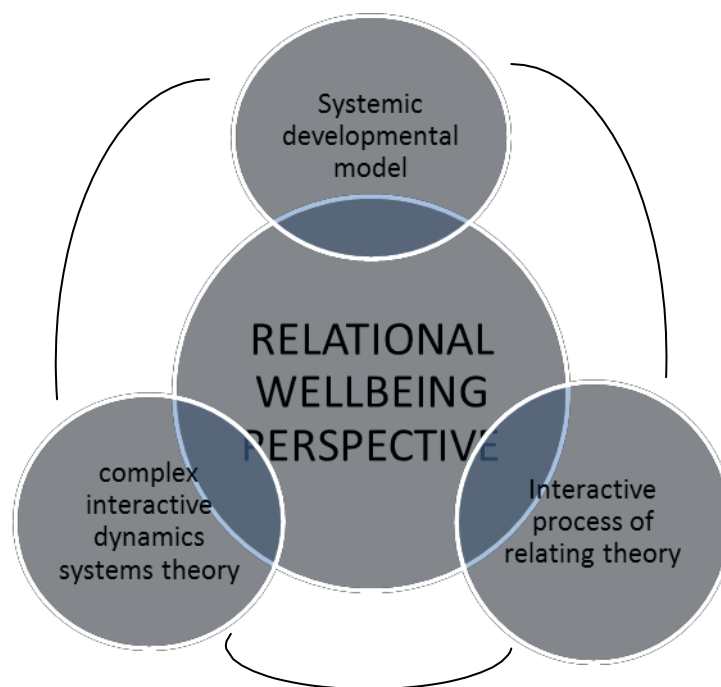
This necessitates an understanding that humans are relational beings and that the interactions between them are complex and reciprocal in nature as indicated in the theoretical framework presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING BULLYING BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOL COMMUNITIES

3.1 Introduction

The exploration of the relational experiences of children who were involved in bullying incidents in South African school communities, is conducted from a well-being perspective and informed by a systemic-developmental model (Atlas & Pepler, 1998), complex responsive processes of relating theory (Stacey, 2003, 2007) and complex interactive dynamic systems perspective (Jörg, 2009).



3.2 A wellbeing perspective on human behaviour

A well-being perspective, as described by Evans and Prilleltensky (2007), is embedded in the core principles of community psychology which focuses on the study of people within their social context. A community psychology perspective holds the assumption that people cannot be understood apart from their context (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Nelson and Prilleltensky states that the well-being of every individual is highly dependent on his or her relationships and the community in which the person resides.

Within each level there exist various signs or indicators of well-being. On the individual level, well-being includes personal control, choice, self-esteem, competence, independence, political rights and positive identity. According to Schueller (2009), positive emotions are also included at an individual level. Positive emotions are said to play a crucial role in individual well-being and also contributes toward better occupational, social and physical functioning.

Well-being on a relational level refers to individuals that form part of a network of supportive and positive relationships and in which individuals play an active role (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). With the emphasis on supportive and positive relationships, the signs of well-being will therefore include aspects such as caring, collaboration and reciprocity. Research conducted by White (2008) confirm the opinions of Evans and Prilleltensky that people tend to define well-being according to their relatedness with others, with an emphasis on respect and happiness. Happiness was the most frequently used term that the participants

used in their conceptualisation of well-being with emphasis on harmoniously close relationships.

With regard to well-being within the school context, Konu and Rimpelä (2002) indicate that the ability to develop and maintain social relationships contribute to a sense of well-being in the school context. Having good positive relationships with each other has a positive effect on the well-being of both teachers and children and seemingly enhances the academic achievement of children.

Referring to well-being at the community and societal level, wellbeing includes the individual's ability to obtain basic resources such as employment, education and housing. Members in communities support each other in order for needs to be fulfilled (Evans & Prilleltensky, 2007). The collective level of wellbeing as described above is referred to as the „material dimension“ of well-being as discussed by White (2008). The material dimension of wellbeing includes access to education and being able to obtain basic resources within the community.

Konu and Rimpelä (2002) further emphasise that the various levels of well-being are all interrelated. On a relational level, having positive relationships is likely to promote a person's resources in society, contributing towards the well-being on a community and societal level and in turn these positive relationships seemingly enhance academic achievement of children which in turn has an effect on the personal well-being of children.

It is therefore important to consider that well-being does not merely refer to the health and welfare of individuals, but is a transaction between individuals and their environments, in other words a reciprocal process. In this context relationships play a significant role in facilitating this transaction as suggested by Prilleltensky (2006) who argues that relational well-being mediates individual and collective well-being.

Viewed from a well-being perspective, bullying behaviour certainly presents a threat to the enhancement of well-being on all three levels; the individual, relational and collective (school community). A well-being perspective also implies that spaces need to be created to avoid bullying behaviour. This can be achieved by not merely focusing on the negative aspects, but to emphasise and explore positive aspects between all members in school communities that contribute towards enabling school communities (Kitching, Roos & Ferreira, 2010)

3.3 The systemic-developmental model

The systemic-developmental model developed by Cairns and Cairns (1991) contributes to a contextual understanding of bullying behaviour by exploring the links between social cognition of aggressive children and the social networks in which they are entrenched. The implementation of the systemic-developmental model by Atlas and Pepler (1998) provides a deeper understanding of bullying behaviour as a dynamic, non-linear process that involves various interactions with different agents within a system. The model provides a basis for the analysis and integration of the individual factors, inter-individual interaction, social relations and cultural and ecological conditions that might possibly

contribute towards the development of aggressive behaviour in children. The first variable within the systemic-developmental model is the individual characteristics of the bully and victim. Individual characteristics described by Atlas and Pepler (1998) refer to the perceptions of the person as a bully or victim. The bully is usually perceived as having an aggressive personality style and has physical strength to his advantage whereas on the other hand, the victim tends to be perceived as weak and having an anxious personality style. Another individual characteristic that comes into play is that of gender. Research suggests that boys are more likely to disclose whether they have bullied someone else. Previous studies (De Wet, 2005; Naser et al., 2004; Parsons, 2005) further suggest that boys tend to be more aggressive than girls and that although both genders engage in bullying behaviour, how they experience it, is different.

The second variable in this model is the „*dyadic relationship between victim and bully*.“ This involves how they relate and interact with one another. This relationship is often characterized by an imbalance of power. According to Olweus (1993), the power imbalance between the victim and bully is essentially what defines bullying. It is not considered bullying if both partners are of equal physical or psychological strength. The power imbalance can be derived from individual characteristics such as size or strength or from the support of others within the social context, such as onlookers who reinforce the bullying behaviour (Atlas & Pepler, 1998).

The third variable within the systemic-developmental model is the „social ecology of bullying“. This includes the interactions with other agents within a system such as teachers and other peers (Atlas & Pepler, 1998). Peers can reinforce the behaviour by actively joining

in or by not reprimanding the behaviour of the bully. According to a study conducted by Craig (as cited by Atlas & Pepler, 1998) peers were present in 85% of bullying episodes and intervened in only 11% of those episodes. The role that peer groups play in bullying interactions may contribute towards the sustainment of such behaviours. The role of teachers is also important to consider when it comes to bullying interactions. Due to the covert nature of bullying behaviour, teachers may not always be aware of bullying incidents and therefore cannot always intervene. Furthermore, teachers do not always understand bullying and therefore they may feel that they lack the required skills to successfully deal with bullying incidents.

Not only does it include interactions with various individuals, but it also focuses attention on the structure and social context. The dynamics created for example within the classroom is different to the dynamics created on the playground. Research has found that the interactions differ depending on various contexts. To provide one example, direct bullying is more prevalent on the playground as there is less structure and supervision. Within the classroom setting, where there is more structure and where teachers are present, bullying is often indirect in nature which makes it more difficult for teachers to pick up on such behaviours (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Craig, Pepler & Atlas, 2000; Beane, 1999; Rivers & Smith, 1994).

3.4. A complexity perspective on human behaviour

The term complexity, according to Morrison (2002) is derived from the Latin „to entwine“ and therefore suggests that an organism interacts dynamically with its environment, influencing and, in turn, being influenced by its environment. Complexity theory is a process theory that introduces a new language that describes the complex dynamics involved in being together in everyday life (Shaw, 2002). A complexity perspective on human behaviour holds the premise that human interaction is a complex dynamic process in which people influence and are being influenced by one another in their social networks (Stacey, 2000; 2003).

As individuals, people do not merely have an effect on each other they interact with each other, and through their interactions shape their experiences of each other. The interaction between individuals as elements of the system is based on a set of rules that requires them to examine and respond to each other's behaviour in order to improve their behaviour and thus the behaviour of the system they constitute (Stacey, 1996). In a system, individuals respond according to their own local principles of interaction that is, their own capacity to respond. The way in which individuals respond emerges from their histories of interaction (Stacey, 2003). By making sense of this information we go through a process of „self-organisation“ in which we reflect (again, an internalisation of a social process instead of a so called „individual mind“) about the information received, assimilate what we choose to make our own and reject that information which does not belong to us. This process in itself is non-linear in that is spontaneous and cannot be controlled. Through this chaos, trying to make sense of our experiences, we reach a state of higher order and in turn we co-evolve together (Badenhorst, 1995; Radford, 2006; Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2000; Stacey, 2003).

The theory of complex responsive processes of relating developed by Shaw (2002) and Stacey (2003; 2007a; 2007b) suggest that people continuously act in ways that evoke and provoke responses from each other and, in the process, patterns of being together develop in emergent self-organising ways (Morrison, 2002). All the members in the school community are thus continuously involved in the interactive processes that take place between them on a daily basis (Burr, 1995). Human behaviour and behavioural challenges should hence be understood in terms of the web of relational interrelatedness (Gergen, 2009; Gergen & Gergen, 2008; Josselson, 1996) and not as individual acts of the unconscious mind (Stacey, 2001).

Relationships imply conversations between people either in the mind of the individual or between individuals. In these conversations people resonate with each other in nurturing and constraining ways. As Shaw (2002) argues, conversations are a process of communicative actions through which we organise ourselves. We have no control over this process of self-organization, but rather we continuously shape and are being shaped in our interactions (relationships) with others.

In concurrence with the work of Stacey (2001; 2003; 2007), Jörg (2004) argues that it is not merely the information shared within human interaction which is important. The influence of the interaction between people is rather considered as central in their engagements with one another. In terms of the interaction between people, Jörg (2004) argues that the interaction is casual and direct in nature when two people exchange information. However, while information is exchanged, a reciprocal, on-going process of influence between the two persons takes place, which involves the strength of the influence and the experience

of each person in the interactions between them. Therefore, in the context of bullying it is the strength of the influence of the interactions that will contribute towards the kind and quality of the relationship experienced by both, rather than the information that is shared between them. Therefore, in order to understand bullying behaviour we need to obtain a deeper understanding of the interactive processes between people and the strength of the influence that these processes have.

A complexity perspective provides a radically alternative way of thinking about the interaction between individuals in a social context such as a school and has been used to understand the interactive dynamics in schools (Morrison, 2002). From a complexity theory perspective schools are viewed as complex, adaptive systems that possess a capability for self-organisation which enables them to facilitate change. In these complex, adaptive systems, the interactions between people on the different levels give rise to the behaviour of the school as a whole in non-linear, self-organising ways. According to the theory of complex responsiveness processes of relating (Stacey, 2001; 2003; 2007a; 2007b; Shaw 2002), schools are viewed as reiterating patterns of being together. The members of a school community are interdependent, and individual minds are formed by the social interactions between them while they, in turn, form the social relations in iterative, non-linear self-organising processes (Stacey, 2003).

The focus in addressing problems in schools should therefore be on the actual dynamic interactions (Stacey, 1997; Davis & Sumara, 2001) between the people in the school context and not only on the behaviour of individuals. In schools, the interaction between individuals as elements of the complex adaptive system is rich in the sense that any element

in the system influences and is influenced by other elements in the system non-linearly (Gatrell, 2005). As people make sense of their experiences they reach a state of higher order and in turn co-evolve together (Badenhorst, 1995; Radford, 2006; Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2000; Stacey, 2003).

3.5 Integration of systemic developmental model and complexity theories

The complexity theories hold the premise that an individual does not stand alone but rather in relation to others and it is within these ways of relating and interacting that we can better understand how bullying behaviour unfolds (Jörg, 2009; Stacey, 2003; Spretnak, 2011). The systemic-developmental model agrees with the complexity theory in that it involves integration at all levels; individual, inter-individual, social, cultural and ecological. Both of these theories emphasise the relationships within the various dimensions and therefore bullying behaviour is seen as a relationship problem that requires relationship solutions. It is therefore necessary to make a shift in order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of bullying behaviour. As the binocular perspective states, we need to expand our focus and include children's relationships in order to comprehensively understand this phenomenon.

3.6 Summary

The discussions in Part 1 show how current research has approached bullying behaviour. Current literature aims to explain bullying behaviour from a positivist perspective through the use of questionnaires (De Wet, 2005; De Wet, 2007; Greeff & Grobler, 2008; Kruger, 2010; Neser et al, 2004). The positive perspective suggests a linear cause and effect

approach through which causal links are made between the individual and event (Creswell, 2012; De Vos et al., 2011; Macdonald & Swart, 2004; Quigg, 2011). In contrast to the positivist perspective, the researcher suggests that all bullying behaviour is relational and therefore the binocular perspective, systemic-developmental model and complexity theories are necessary in order to understand bullying behaviour (Atlas & Pepler, 1998; Jörg, 2009; Spretnak, 2011; Stacey, 2003).

These theories suggest that people cannot be understood in isolation and the interactive dynamics between people and their environment is important to understand the unfolding of bullying behaviour. As Stacey (2003) states, it is not the individuals per se that have an effect on each other. Rather, it is the interactions between individuals and the meanings people attach to their experiences through which they shape and are being shaped. Working from an interpretive-constructivist paradigm (Creswell, 2012; De Vos et al., 2011; Ponterotto, 2005), the researcher aimed to explore the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents through the exploration of their lived experiences and the subjective meanings they attach to their experiences. Considering that the study was conducted in the African context, it is important to note that a complexity perspective is more in line with the African philosophy that the self emerges in dialogue with other human beings (Mkhize, 2003).

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will discuss the research design and methodology. This discussion will include explanations relating to the research paradigm, the design and methodology used for this study, the context of the study, selection of the participants, data gathering, data analysis, trustworthiness, procedures and the ethical considerations.

4.2 Research paradigm

A research paradigm is a worldview that guides the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1994) and sets the context for a study (Ponterotto, 2005). In this study an interpretive paradigm (De Vos et al., 2011) was applied in order to make meaning out of the information obtained in the research process (Rossman & Rallis, 2003), with the aim of understanding bullying behaviour from a relational perspective. Working from an interpretive paradigm, the ontological assumption is that reality is socially constructed. People contribute meaning through their experiences. The meanings people attach to their experiences are varied and multiple. The researcher therefore seeks to explore the complexity of views rather than narrowing the meanings of individuals into a few categories (Ashworth, 2003; Creswell, 2012). Ponterotto (2005) adds that the constructivist position is one where the meaning is hidden and must be brought to the surface through deep reflection. Reflection can be stimulated through researcher-participant interaction. Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge is obtained (Creswell, 2012; Ponterotto, 2005). Working from an interpretive-constructivism paradigm, knowledge is obtained through the subjective meanings people

attach to their experiences. In this paradigm, the researcher and participants are actively involved in the research process through which the researcher aims to lessen the distance between him/ herself and the person being researched (Cresswell, 2012). Knowledge is obtained through exploring the lived experiences of the participants and therefore the dynamic interaction between the researcher and participant is central to interpretive-constructivist worldview (Ponterotto, 2005).

4.3 Context of the study

The context in which the research was conducted involved three secondary schools in a semi-urban area in the Western Cape. All three the school accommodate learners from areas where poverty, drug abuse and violence are evident in the immediate surroundings of the school. Although limited in nature, some resources to provide support are made available by stakeholders who render a support services to address the problems associated with these social ills.

All three schools have limited infrastructural resources. Classrooms are not well equipped and access to computers is limited, while sport grounds are not effectively developed. These schools also provide limited access to after-school activities due to the infrastructural restraints. The infrastructural problems cannot be addressed by the school due to their inability to charge additional school fees to supplement the basic government funding that these schools receive, as many parents cannot afford the school fees charged. The schools are therefore only able to provide very basic school resources for teaching and learning.

Regarding the quantile system, all South African public ordinary schools are divided into five categories. The categories are referred to as quantiles and provide an indication of the school's financial resources. Quantile one is considered the 'poorest,' while quantile five is the 'least poor.' Schools that fall within quantile one, two and three are referred to as 'no-fee' schools, whereas schools in quantile four and five are considered fee-paying schools (Grant, 2013).

Within the Western Cape, 8, 6 % of learners fall within the category of learners in the poorest 20% of South Africa. Furthermore, within the Western Cape 40% of schools are no fee schools, in quantile one, two and three (Grant, 2013). The poverty levels of Western Cape, are relatively lower compared to the rest of the country. However, due to in-migration and the current economic situation, many communities are experiencing an increase in economic pressure (Grant, 2013).

The quintile ranking of schools is important as it determines the amount of funding the school receives each year and whether the school is allowed to charge school fees or not. As indicated within the diagram below, all three schools fall within quantile one, two and three, making them no fee schools (Grant, 2013).

The diagram (4.3.1) below provides information specific to each of the three contexts.

	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCHOOL C
	Semi-rural quintile 2	Rural Quintile 1	Rural Quintile 1
Number of learners	450 children	914 learners	1355 children

Number of teachers	23 teachers	32 teachers	45 teachers
Ethnic groups	Coloured, Black and a minority White learners	Mainly coloured children, but in recent years an increase of black learners	Mainly coloured children, fair amount of isiXhosa learners, minority White learners (only one White learner)
Language spoken by children	isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans	isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans	isiXhosa, English and Afrikaans
Language of Instruction	Afrikaans and English	Dual medium school- Afrikaans and English. Only one isiXhosa educator.	Afrikaans
Socio-economic conditions	Most learners are from low socio-economic communities. Poverty is a reality within the community. High unemployment rate.	Most learners come from low socio-economic groups. The unemployment rate is relatively high in the area and members of the school community (the parents) do very little to generate self-employment.	The majority of the children come from low-income areas in the community. High unemployment rate. Many of the parents receive government grants. Many of the learners live in informal settlements
Assets specifically mentioned	<p>Smaller (between 20-30 learners in a class) classes allows for the children to receive more individual attention and the school has established a good relationship with the Department of Education from which they receive adequate support.</p> <p>Assets of the school include the diversity of cultures and languages that provide children with the opportunity to</p>	<p>Current assets of the school include support provided by a particular foundation in a nearby area. The persons involved in the school provide support for both educators and children.</p> <p>Cultural diversity provide learners with the opportunity to build relationships with peers outside their own racial and cultural boundaries. Cultural diversity of learners encourages the school to adopt an</p>	<p>Children tend to be high achievers on the sport field- this year five learners are selected for provincial teams, three learners in the under eighteen rugby team and two learners playing in the under sixteen teams.</p> <p>There are a number of non-academic programs such as leadership, HIV awareness as well as</p>

	<p>build relationships outside their own racial and cultural boundaries.</p> <p>The teachers at the school are qualified, dedicated and passionate with a focus on the holistic wellbeing of children and not only on the children's academic performance.</p> <p>With the school being, both a primary and high school, it makes it easier for learners to transition to secondary school. It also assists the teachers in terms of planning progress and support</p>	inclusivity approach.	<p>spiritual and cultural programs available for the learners as well as extra classes (mathematics, life sciences, accounting) over weekends and holidays.</p> <p>The overall matriculation results are quite good- over the past three years eighty percent of the matrics, passed.</p>
Challenges specifically mentioned	<p>Due to the fact that children in these contexts are from different ethnic backgrounds, misunderstandings among the students are often reported in these contexts. These misunderstandings contribute in part to conflict between people and in some instances lead to bullying. The teachers in these contexts admit that they are not well equipped to deal with the behaviour displayed by children during these incidents and are not comfortable to deal with the ethical</p>	<p>With the increase isiXhosa learners, and having only one Xhosa educator, language can be a barrier to effective learning as learners may not be as competent in Afrikaans or English as they are in their home language.</p> <p>Problems and challenges that the school faces include poverty, teenage pregnancies, drug abuse and inappropriate exposure to sexual activities. The exposure of alcohol and drugs are overwhelming due to the small living environment. Young children are exposed to sexual activities because</p>	<p>No hall to accommodate learners during exams</p> <p>Learner absenteeism and associated problems such as drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, poor discipline and aggression amongst learners is a reality.</p> <p>Although parents have to pay school fees, more than half of parents do not pay the required fees which places the school under great financial pressure.</p> <p>Due to lack of funds</p>

	<p>misunderstandings.</p> <p>Particular scarcities in the school resources include sport equipment and technology equipment.</p> <p>A major constraint is the fact that there are limited subject options available for the students due to the fact that it is a relatively small school with a small staffing component.</p> <p>Furthermore there are limited funds for books, reading series as well as prescribed literature materials.</p> <p>Other challenges, that the school face is the lack of parental involvement and the inability of parents to provide academic support at home due to their own limited education as well as many parents working long hours.</p> <p>A great concern for the school is the lack of support and involvement from the community.</p> <p>Violence and drug abuse are also problems within the immediate community.</p> <p>Furthermore, due to poverty many learners come to school feeling</p>	<p>there are no (or very limited) partitioning in the houses or „shacks“. The lack of youth activities and lack of adult supervision before and after school contributes towards learners staying away from school and engaging in alcohol abuse.</p> <p>Establishing partnerships and obtaining support from possible partnerships appears to be a frustration for school staff. According to the school staff, the process of obtaining support from partnerships appears to be a dragging process and in which tangible contributions are missing.</p> <p>Continuity of attending staff meetings are a problem due to the fact that the management team have to rotate so that everybody's workload can be accommodated for.</p>	<p>available as well as lack of support from the community the school finds conservation of school facilities as a challenge.</p> <p>Lack of parental support in extra-mural activities.</p> <p>Lack of support from parents and community in attending functions at the school.</p>
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	hungry. This is a great concern, as learners find it difficult to concentrate in the class and experience low-energy levels.		
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4.4 Research design and methodology

A qualitative phenomenological research design was applied to explore the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents. The phenomenological design is suitable for understanding a particular phenomenon by exploring several individual experiences and the meaning they attach to their experiences (De Vos et al., 2011; Creswell, 2012; Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). According to Willig (2008), interpretative phenomenology as a means to conduct qualitative research, allows the researcher to gain a better understanding of the nature as well as the quality of particular phenomena which presents itself in particular contexts.

In this study the phenomenon of bullying was explored through an in-depth exploration of relational experiences of children who were involved in bullying incidents in their school communities. From a qualitative stance the researcher is allowed to explore the ways in which children make sense of their experiences within the contexts in which they are embedded and thus enables the researcher to obtain a better understanding of the particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Willig, 2008; Marecek, 2003).

The population for this study were grade 8-11 children (N=39) from three secondary schools in the Western Cape area. The sample in this study included a group of children who were purposively selected. The researcher applied purposive sampling to ensure that all key

constituencies that are relevant to the phenomenon are covered (Ritchie, Lewis & Elam, 2003). The participants were selected based on their involvement in bullying incidents, either as persons accused of bullying, persons identified as victims, persons identified as bystanders or as persons closely related to the aforementioned individuals. The researcher refrained from using labels such as „bully“ or victim“ as this way of thinking contribute toward an individualist perspective without considering complex dynamics involved. Participants were selected following a consultation with the principal and management team. They identified a group of children based on the above-mentioned criteria. The identified persons were clearly informed of what the study was about, that participation was voluntary and they were then asked whether they were willing to participate.

The number of participants selected to participate in the **first phase** of data collection were approximately 15-20 children from each school, between grade 8 and 11. During this session, the participants were clearly informed of what the study was about, what would be expected of them and how they would be protected throughout the research process. They were asked to discuss the invitation to participate with their parents or guardians and after that indicate to the coordinating teacher at the school if they would be willing to participate.

Permission from the parents and assent from the children was obtained from thirty three children in total across the three school sites. Keeping the principles of saturation as described by Nelson and Paisley (2001) in mind, the data obtained was sufficient and there was no need to recruit more children.

For the **second phase** of the study the researcher and supervisor agreed to select four individuals from each school (n=16) keeping in mind that there might be participants who did

not wish to participate in the interviews. These participants were purposively selected to represent various experiences of the groups- as the person accused of bullying, the person who has been victimised or as a witness of a bullying incident. By the time the interviews were conducted, a total (n) of six children ended up participating in the interviews. No further children were therefore required as data saturation had been reached. The diagram below provides an overview of the participants involved in the study.

PHASE 1:				
Number of total participants	33			
Language of participants	Afrikaans and English			
Grade of participants	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade10	Grade 11
(Number of participants in each grade)	11	6	7	9

PHASE 2: Individual interviews				
Number of total participants	6			
Language of participants	Afrikaans			
Grade of participants	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade10	Grade11
(Number of participants in each grade)	2	1	1	2

4.5. Data gathering

The research methods in this study were aimed at obtaining rich deep data on the relational experiences of children's who were involved in bullying incidents in three secondary schools.

In the first phase, due to the limited availability of children for interviews, and the fact that focus group interviews might lead to conflict between the participants, the researcher

used written assignments (see Kitching, Roos & Ferreira, 2012) to ensure the inclusion of multiple voices regarding the phenomenon. This allowed the researcher to obtain some understanding with regards to the children's relational experiences involved in bullying incidents. The selected participants were asked to complete a qualitative questionnaire that included a short essay question and 20 incomplete sentences such as: "Before children bully..." "Children and children in our school..." (See addendum E for Afrikaans or F for English). The short essay question involved responses to their experiences in bullying incidents. The incomplete sentences which were open-ended allowed for responses based on children's own experiences and therefore refrained from leading the participants into a specific direction. The short essay question and the incomplete sentences were developed in consultation with the researcher's supervisor, and were based on the research literature and the theoretical perspectives that informed this study. This ensured that the questionnaires included questions relevant to the phenomenon of bullying and were phrased in accordance with the developmental phase of the children.

The researcher visited each of the schools and the participants completed the written assignments under the supervision of the researcher to ensure that they do not rely on other sources of information other than their own relational experiences. Before the participants commenced with the completion of the qualitative questionnaires the researcher briefly explained what was expected of the children and invited them to ask questions to clarify any uncertainties. The researcher consciously refrained from providing any support regarding possible answers. The participants were allowed approximately 60-80 minutes to complete the qualitative questionnaires.

In the second phase the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with six children. The semi-structure interviews provided the researcher with the opportunity to ask questions so as to obtain a clear picture of the participant's relational experiences regarding bullying incidents in the school (Smith, 1995; Smith & Osborn, 2003; Willig, 2008). Semi-structured interviews (see addendum G for Afrikaans and addendum H for English) include a degree of flexibility which allows the researcher and the participant to be guided by the interview and the interaction between them, and from this the researcher is able to gain an understanding regarding the participants' perceptions and experiences (De Vos et al, 2011; Fylan, 2005; Smith, 1995; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The interviews were semi-structured and the researcher used a list of predetermined questions that were open-ended in nature to allow the participants to provide their own responses. These questions guide the interview process instead of being dictating a fixed interview schedule (De Vos et al., 2011; Fylan, 2005; Willig, 2008). In the process of developing the open-ended questions the researcher ensured that the questions were neutral and did not guide the participants in any specific direction, taking cognisance of the sensitive nature of the topic (Smith, 1995). Based on the ethical aspects, the researcher wanted to refrain from any form of labelling and therefore making use of neutral questions helped in this regard. The semi-structured interview also allowed for probing questions to be asked when necessary as suggested by De Vos et al. (2011) and Smith and Osborn (2003). The opportunity to ask probing questions (when needed) contributed to the richness of the data obtained (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

The participants were purposively selected to represent the various experiences of the groups as indicated earlier. The participants' responses in the written assignments were considered when inviting them to participate in the interviews. The intention with the individual interviews was to explore the phenomenon of bullying in the school context in more depth. Once the researcher selected the participants, the researcher collaborated with the coordinator at each of these schools regarding the selection of participants. After the selected participants agreed (n=6) to participate in the study, dates and times were set with each of these schools to conduct the semi-structured individual interviews. The researcher checked with the coordinators to make sure that no other participants volunteered to participate in the individual interviews. She then proceeded with the individual interviews. The interviews were conducted at each school during times when the learners were not occupied with academic work. The researcher went to each of these schools and conducted the interviews in private classrooms or offices as it was the most convenient for the participants. Before commencing with the interview, the participants were assured that any information they provided would be kept confidential. The individual interviews lasted approximately 40-60 minutes. On completion of the interview, the participants were thanked for their participation and allowed to ask questions or request an interview with a counsellor if they felt the need. All the interviews were recorded with the permission of the participants and transcribed during the data analysis stage using the guidelines set by Poland (2005).

4.6 Data analysis

Thematic analysis was applied in this study. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) and Willig (2008) thematic analysis is a method that is used in order to identify, analyse and

report patterns/themes within a data, set. Regarding the first set of data which included the qualitative questionnaires (i.e., the short essay question and incomplete sentences), the researcher became familiar with the data through interpretive reading while at the same time coding the data by writing words and short phrases relating to her interpretations (see Addendum I and J) The codes were grouped together and typed up in order to organise data and identify possible themes.

The second set of data (phase two of the study) which involved the semi-structured interviews, were transcribed. After reading through the transcriptions, codes were then generated in response to the data and were incorporated into the themes from the first data set. With assistance from the researcher's supervisor, the themes were revised and refined to only highlight the most evident themes as well as subthemes. From these themes the researcher produced a report which discussed the research findings. The transcriptions were translated to English (within the presentation of findings) and the translations were double-checked by the project supervisor to ensure accuracy. Back translations were also done by the language editor to ensure correct translations of the transcribed interviews (Lemal, 2008).

4.7 Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in this study has been ensured through the crystallisations of the data. Crystallisation is a process that includes a combination of various forms of analysis and representations of different kinds of data which in turn delivers in-depth descriptions of a particular phenomenon through which we obtain an understanding of others lived experiences (Ellingson, 2009; Tracy, 2010).

Crystallisation took place through:

(a) The use of multiple methods which were qualitative questionnaires that included a short essay question as well as incomplete sentences and individual interviews. These methods further involved different genres or mediums (Ellingson, 2009). The genres in this study included written texts and the audio from the individual interviews. Tracy (2010) argues that the use of multiple methods contributes toward a more complex, in-depth understanding of the particular phenomenon. Utilising various theoretical perspectives/lenses (as presented within chapter 3) further contributes toward crystallisation of the study (Tracy, 2010).

(b) Multivocality was ensured by including the voices of children who were positioned as a bully, victim or bystander in bullying incidents. The written assignment as well as the individual interviews provided the space for participants to freely express their opinions and experiences which allowed the various viewpoints of the participants to emerge.

(c) Bracketing of personal assumptions (researcher bias) was used by the researcher through consistent reflection on her own position. The use of personal journaling and ongoing conversations with the project supervisor assisted to bracket the researcher's own opinions, meanings, feelings and thoughts in order to avoid her influencing the participants or the findings of the study.

(d) Rich rigour was adopted by using multiple methods to gather the data. In this manner the researcher was able to obtain in-depth descriptions that related to the relational experiences of the children involved in bullying incidents. Multivocality further contributed toward the richness of data as suggested by Tracy (2010).

(e) To contribute to the credibility of the study in-depth and detailed descriptions of the research context, methods and the research findings is presented. This will allow other researchers to apply the findings to their own contexts or conduct similar research.

Finally, the researcher, who acted as the main instrument in this study, constantly reflected on psychological, sociocultural, academic, career-related or any other personal characteristics which might have influenced data collection and interpretation in order to minimise biased findings. She also shared her biases and assumptions about participants and the phenomenon with her supervisor to reduce researcher bias, while upholding self-reflectivity (Creswell, 2009; Ellingson, 2009; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.8 The research process

Due to another related project being run concurrently in the same school, the researcher was granted permission to access the necessary school communities in order to conduct her research. Ethical approval was obtained from the North West University to conduct this particular study. Before data gathering took place, approval was also obtained from the Western Cape Education Department (see Attached letter Addendum L). Data gathering that involved written responses and individual interviews were conducted in a private setting on the school premises.

The children gave assent to participate in the study after permission was obtained in writing from their parents or primary caregivers. Participation was voluntary. Participants were also informed that, if they wish to withdraw from the study, they were free to do so at any stage in the research process.

Prior to the data collection process appointments were made with the school coordinator regarding the time of when the written assignments as well as individual interviews would be conducted.

Throughout the research project continuous contact was made with coordinators to ensure a relationship of trust, open communication and to show respect towards the community and each individual involved. Confidentiality was ensured by the researcher.

The participants were clearly informed about all the required ethical issues (please see ethical considerations below).

4.9 Ethical considerations

For the purpose of this study, the researcher has been guided to act ethically, based on the values stipulated by the Constitution of South Africa (1993) that include human dignity, equality and freedom.

Permission to conduct this study has been granted by the ethics committee of the North West University. The ethical clearance number is: NWU-00060-12-A. Permission has also been obtained from the Western Cape Education Department through the Area Project Office in the District where the school is situated and permission for the research was also granted by the principal of the schools. The parents of all the children involved in this study also gave permission after being informed in writing (Addendum A or B) of the purpose of the study.

Non-maleficence: This refers to avoidance of harm; may be it physical or emotional harm to participants either unintentionally or intentionally (De Angelis, 2011; Fouka & Mantzorou, 2011). To protect the participants from harm due to the sensitive nature and the conflict potential of discussion on the topic the researcher refrained from using any labels such as bullies, victims or bystanders when selecting the participants. She also conducted individual interviews with the participants to ensure that persons who were involved in incidents did not have to be in the same settings while discussing the incidents in which they were involved. The researcher refrained from in-depth discussions of incidents and was sensitive to the emotional state of participants. Support was made available for participants who experienced emotional discomfort due to their involvement in the research. An NGO (which provides psychological services) that is in close collaboration with the research agreed to be available if children required their services.

Informed consent: Regarding consent to participate, participants and their parents/caregivers were clearly informed about the rationale, aim and the potential contribution of the study before they were expected to give their consent to participate in the study. In other words participants were not misled about the nature and aim of the study (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; Creswell, 2012).

Voluntary participation: The participants were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they would not be discriminated against or penalised in any way if they refused to participate (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; Creswell, 2012). They were allowed to withdraw from the research at any stage and no explanation was required. Each participant's parents signed a consent form to confirm that they gave permission for their child to

participate in the study. The participants themselves signed an assent form to indicate that they were well informed and agreed to participate voluntarily.

Anonymity was ensured, meaning that the name of the participant was not able to be linked to the data. Participants' names were not revealed in the transcriptions or the research findings. Anonymity was ensured by using pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants. Each participant was allocated a number that was used to refer to their statements. Participants' names were not revealed in the transcriptions or the research findings (Babbie, 2010; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Research was conducted in an empty classroom or office.

Confidentiality was maintained by not sharing any information that was provided by the participants with staff members of the school or any other persons, besides the supervisor and the person who assisted with the transcriptions. Furthermore, access to the raw data and the transcription was limited. The raw data and the transcriptions have been safely locked away at NWU premises and a code required to access the data and the transcriptions is known only to the researcher and supervisor (Creswell, 2012; Babbie, 2010; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008)

Beneficence, social accountability and responsibility: Not only was the focus on avoiding harm of participants, but essentially to contribute toward the well-being of others (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008; De Angelis, 2011). The aim of the research project was to gain a deeper understanding regarding the phenomenon of bullying behaviour. This comprehensive understanding of bullying behaviour allows for further research and the creation of effective solutions for bullying behaviour in school communities.

No persons were deliberately deceived by the findings. The research findings were not manipulated or falsified in any way. Through constant supervision, academic rigour and personal integrity the researcher upheld the ethical standards required of a Masters dissertation (Creswell, 2012; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2008). Throughout the research project, the researcher consulted with the supervisor on a regular basis to ensure that the ethical requirements were met. The researcher acknowledges that final ethical responsibility rests with her in terms of fulfilling ethical requirements throughout all stages of the study.

Great effort has been made in terms of avoiding any form of plagiarism. All the contributors have been appropriately acknowledged while at the same time upholding the confidentiality of the research participants (Babbie, 2010; Creswell, 2012).

4.10 Summary

In this chapter the research design and methodology allowed the researcher to explore the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents within secondary school communities. The adoption of a qualitative phenomenological research design allowed the researcher to use qualitative data gathering methods (the written assignment and semi-structured individual interviews) as a means to obtain an in-depth understanding regarding the phenomenon of bullying. The data was analysed by means of thematic analysis. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through the crystallisation of the data as suggested by Ellingson (2009) and Tracy (2010).

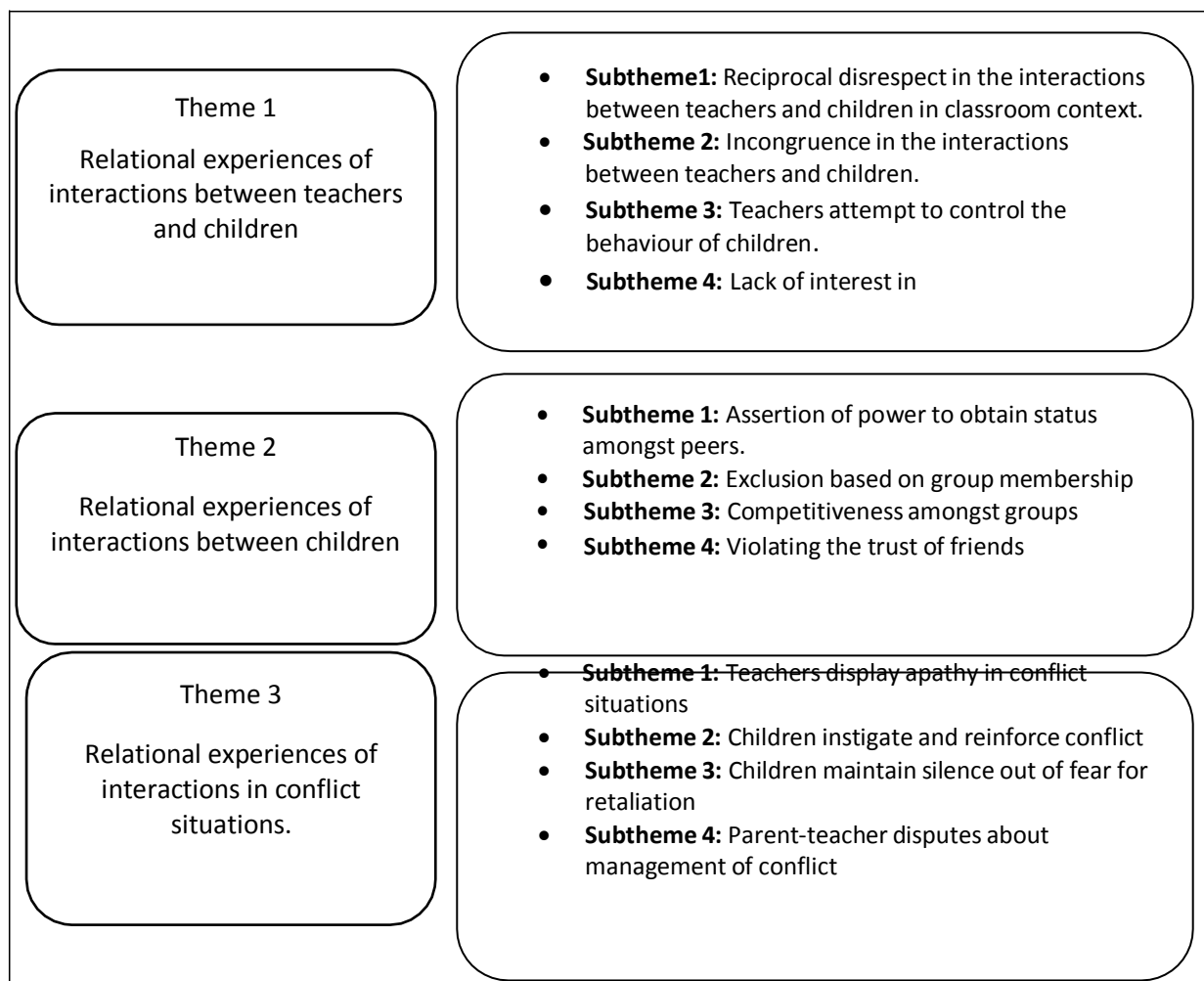
CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter the findings of this study are presented. The diagram below gives an overview of the themes and subthemes that were identified in response to the research question: What are the relational experiences of children who were involved in bullying incidents in schools?

DIAGRAM 1: OVERVIEW OF THEMES AND SUBTHEMES



5.2 Presentation of findings

5.2.1 Theme 1: Relational experiences of interactions between teachers and children

The theme refers to the way in which the participants who were exposed to bullying incidents in the school, experience the everyday interactions between teachers and children in the school context. The participants' responses during the interviews indicated that their relational experiences involve reciprocal disrespect, incongruence, control and a lack of interest in the interactions between teachers and children.

5.2.1.1 Subtheme: Reciprocal disrespect in the interactions between teachers and children in classroom contexts

Participants in the study experienced that teachers and children are often disrespectful towards one another. In some instances, children act disrespectfully:

They talk to the teachers just the way they want, they curse as well- I also cursed at a teacher when I was angry, I said: „leave me, f... you.“ (i4).

In other instances, the disrespectful interactions are reciprocal as indicated;

[They], handle each other very badly. Children talk back to the teachers and the teacher says ugly things to students. (PQ19).

Research conducted by Buttner (2004) who explored both respectful and disrespectful interactions between teachers and children, it was also evident that disrespect clearly does not go in one direction. Children act in ways that are disrespectful towards teachers and the

disrespect is returned. Research conducted by Botha (2014) and Myburgh and Poggenpoel (2009) concur that negative interactions between children and educators are experienced as disrespect. These findings are confirmed in this study, as illustrated in the following comment:

A lot of times the learners doesn't want to work and then the teacher will yell at the children, the teacher will chase them out of the class, but they won't go (i5).

Complex interactive dynamic systems theories (Stacey, 2003; Jörg, 2004; Spretnak, 2009) emphasise that it is not the behaviour of the individual which is important, but rather the dynamic that is created in the interactions between individuals and groups of individuals. Viewed from a complex interactive dynamic systems perspective the reciprocal disrespectful ways in which teachers and children interact generates a disabling interactive dynamic between teacher and learner as clearly indicated in the following excerpt from an interview with one of the participants:

I usually don't listen to them, I just walk away. The teacher gets angry and then he will swear at you and they make you angry. They then don't always understand who was wrong, and then they hit you. Then they want to hit you. / I had an argument with a teacher. He spoke about my age, I failed a year and he told me I can leave school, school is no use to me, he made me angry and I wanted to hit him, but I left it. He cursed at me and I walked out of the classroom (i4).

5.2.1.2 Subtheme: Incongruence in the interactions between teachers and children

The participants experienced that some teachers do not interact with their children in a congruent manner. According to Brown (2005) incongruent interactions between teachers and their students can influence the quality of the relationship and enhance negative feelings between the teacher and learner.

The participants in this study linked the teachers' incongruence to what they described as changes between teachers' good moods and bad moods. One grade 9 learner described the inconsistency in the teachers' moods as follows:

Say for example the teacher is in a good mood and the learner ask to go to the toilet he will be allowed to do so; later he will also be allowed to eat in the classroom, but if another child asks, then the teacher will say "no" or if the teacher is in a grumpy mood and the child asks: "what is wrong?" the teacher will tell him and the child will try and cheer up the teacher, but if the other child asks the same question, then the teacher will say something like: "It's got nothing to do with you" (i2).

The participants furthermore experienced that teachers' incongruent interactions might also be linked to the nature of their relationships with children's parents:

Some teachers are like „because I know your mother, I'm going to treat you better" and because „your dad and I are friends" I am going to provide you with better treatment. I think that learners whose parents are friends with the teacher are benefited, because the teacher is not going to know me that well and he is also not going to make more effort to get to know me, because I am just another number, I am just someone in school. As long he is there to educate me, he doesn't have to care. I

think that is where teachers make the mistake, because those learners can come from bad circumstances and needs more understanding and teachers do not always take that into consideration (i3).

In research conducted by Aydogan (2008) and Botha (2014) participants reported that teachers tended to treat children differently (more positively) if they knew the learner's parents or guardians.

In other instances, the incongruent behaviour of teachers, according to participants has to do with the child's appearance:

They sometimes just look at how you are physically built or at you physical characteristics such as having long hair. So I don't think teachers notice the small things. They sometimes treat some children better than others (i3).

According to the learners, the teachers also respond differently to how the learners' behave or their class performance:

If a child performs badly with work,... you also get those teachers that will say you are just a number, encase you do something, they are not even going to try and help you, because they are almost like: I'm giving you work, you are not doing it, you are not attentive in class, so I am not going to do anything further. You are on your own. This is what brings children down and affects their abilities and I think that is when children get a low self-esteem (i3).

A previous study (Aydogan, 2008) that has been conducted on this topic agrees with these findings, indicating that teachers tend to favour physically attractive children. Children who

are physically attractive are considered to be more talented and therefore they obtain higher grades. On the other hand, children who are physically unattractive are discriminated against (Aydogan, 2008). In the study conducted by Aydogan (2008), participants (learners) indicated that they felt learners who are physically attractive are treated differently by the teachers. Similarly, research indicates that students who are considered to be high academic achievers or who are well-behaved in the classroom were treated more positively by teacher (Botha, 2014). Learners who are considered less successful are treated more harshly by teachers (Aydogan, 2008).

5.2.1.3 Subtheme: Teachers attempt to control the behaviour of children

Children who participated in the study experienced that teachers often attempt to control their behaviour of children by asserting power over them. Some participants experienced this as negative:

The teacher has control over the class....The teachers who have the power will try and show the class that this is my classroom and I can do here what I want, and you can't come and say whatever you want (i1).

The codes of conduct that are drawn up and implemented in schools (Kupchik, 2010; Mestry & Khumalo, 2012) might contribute to this attitude among teachers. The strict rules formulated in these codes of conduct often serve as a way for educators to assert power and control over children, especially when there is a violation of the rules, educators are expected to address behaviour in punitive ways (Bray, 2005; Kupchik, 2010; Mokhele, 2006).

Other participants seemed to accept the control as the way in which the teacher ensures that they fulfil their role to educate children. A grade 10 boy stated:

Most of the time, teachers yell at you or hit you. That is how they show you that they have power over you, because they are the parent at school and they expect you to be obedient, because they do their work and their work is to educate you and they can't educate you if there is no respect (i1).

Teachers who tend to exercise strict control and power over children are often perceived as adopting an autocratic teaching style. These teachers expect swift obedience and when classroom rules are not obeyed the teacher often apply punitive approaches (Murris, 2012). Teachers use this approach to ensure that curricula activities are completed in a timely manner and make no attempt to actively engage the learners in the class (Coetzee, 2006). According to a study conducted by Murris (2012) on learner's perceptions of corporal punishment, some children found physical punishment acceptable since it is applied at home and provides a way to maintain respect. In instances where children misbehave, control is asserted by sending children out of class and giving them hidings:

Some teachers will chase him out of the classroom, or they will hit him with a plank and other teachers will send the child to the principal's office ..., most of the teachers have a plank they use to hit the learners with. Those are the strict teachers (i1).

According to Rossouw (2003), there are still some teachers who believe that corporal punishment is the only way in which children can be disciplined and through which respect can be obtained, despite the changes made in the school system regarding the way in which children are disciplined.

Control is furthermore asserted by threats of suspension:

The teacher took us to the principal. The principal then said if it happens again, he is going to suspend us. The principal is strict with his rules (i4).

Children can also be suspended for a few days:

Sometimes children get suspended for a week (i6).

In the case of serious offences at school, one of the grade 9 participants explains in their school what the consequences are:

Sometimes if it was a serious violation then the child will appear in front of a governing body and sometimes the learner does not return to school, because it is not his first offence. He gets expelled from school and is not allowed to return (i5).

Control is described as a management function with the aim to correct behaviour or improve ability. Certain forms of discipline are seen as a way of controlling behaviour, but some schools justify this by stating that exercising control is a function of creating a positive classroom atmosphere (Coetzee, 2006). Threatening, or actually suspending children from school, is a way of maintaining control over children. Section 9 of the Schools Act states that a learner may be suspended, but only in the case of serious misconduct and specific disciplinary procedures need to be followed (Coetzee, 2006). A learner may not be expelled from school without a fair hearing. Suspending or expelling a learner goes against the Section 29 in the Bill of Rights where it states that every child has equal right to a basic education (Lake & Pendlebury, 2009). Suspending a learner is to refuse a child basic education which in essence is a violation of the law. Furthermore, it is unethical for an educator to threaten

children as a means to assert control over learners as the role of the educator is to protect children and any form of humiliation or harm (physical or psychological) violates the rights of the child (Coetzee, 2006).

5.2.1.4: Subtheme: Lack of interest in children displayed in the interactions between teachers and children.

The participants in this study felt that their teachers did not show much interest in them. They reported that when they wanted to share important matters that upset them as children, the teachers showed very little interest and stopped the conversations:

Some teachers, when you tell them what has happened during break time, they might respond, saying something like: "I'm not the police or the principal." The only reason why he is there that day is to teach you" (i1).

A second learner said that:

Sometimes the teachers avoid the children. There might be something that really hurt me that I want to tell the teacher about and then the teacher might say "I don't have time for this now." (i5).

Previous studies in this field describe teachers' conduct and how this conduct influences the teacher-learner relationship (Kearney et al., 1991; Lewis & Riley, 2009; Teven, 2009).

A study conducted by Kearney et al. (1991) focused on children's perspectives regarding what counts as teacher's inappropriate conduct and how this influenced the

children. Participants confirmed that teachers are apathetic and that the apathy of teachers is perceived as inappropriate behaviour for a teacher. The learners felt that apathy, a lack of concern for children and rejection of children's opinions displayed the teachers' negative behaviour towards the learners. The lack of interest displayed by teachers contributes toward disabling interactions in the sense that children had little or no motivation to develop positive relationships with teachers (Kearney et al., 1991; McDowell, 2011).

The lack of interest in them was seen as a „non-caring“ attitude that is based on teachers' perceptions that they are only there to educate children and not to take care of them as people. Learner 3 explains:

You also get those teachers that will say you are just a number, in case you do something, they are not even going to try and help you, because they are almost like: “I’m giving you work, you are not doing it, you are not attentive in class, so I am not going to do anything further. You are on your own.” This is what brings children down and affects their abilities and I think that is when children get a low self-esteem (i3).

Learners often experience the authoritarian teacher who uses an autocratic management style as cold and non-caring. This teaching style tends to be educator-centred and involves one-way communication and focuses only on curricular activities (Coetzee, 2006). According to Bosworth (1995), Kearney et al. (1991) and Wentzel (1997), teachers

who do not assist learners, both with academic and non-academic work are perceived as non-caring teachers.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Relational experiences of interactions between children

This theme refers to the participants' relational experiences of interactions between children within the school context. The participants experience that the interactions between children involve continuous rudeness and degrading of each other, engaging with the purpose of gaining status, competitiveness between groups, and breaking trust between friends by disclosing friends' secrets.

5.2.2.1 Subtheme: Assertion of power to obtain status amongst peers

Participants experienced that the interactions between children often involve asserting power over each other. They believe that a way of asserting power over another learner is through rudeness towards one another. Participants in this study experienced that interactions between children were characterised by continuous rudeness towards one another. This continuous rudeness involves insulting each other, swearing at each other (i3, i1, i5) and fighting with each other, as everyday ways of relating and interacting. The following statements made by the learners describe this form of learner interaction that takes place at the schools:

They cuss [curse] each other's parents or they insult each other and swear at each other. They swear at each other so badly, using big words that are not appropriate for them to use (i3).

A grade 10 boy (participant) stated:

They are very rude towards one another, they break each other down, say nasty things, swear at each other in the hallways. That is every day, in the class and they come from other classes and just swear (i1).

In a study conducted by Botha (2014) and Closson (2008), the participants indicated that being rude contributes towards giving the learner a higher status and more popularity. Based on the findings of this study, continuous rudeness that involved bullying behaviour was used as a way to gain status. This has seemingly become the norm rather than the exception in the interactions between children in the participating secondary schools.

It is important to note that some participants take an observer position while other participants indicated that they participated in the disenabling interactions:

Sometimes we fight with each other, other times we call each other bad names or we say things like: “your mother is this”... and “your mother is that...” (i5).

Having an observer position is also associated with the way in which children obtain and maintain power. Children prefer to be associated with those who have higher status (and therefore greater sense of power) and choose to align themselves with those learners who engage in these rude behaviours. By aligning themselves with the child who has a higher status, observers and other participants are more likely to also obtain some degree of power (Botha, 2014; Closson, 2008; Closson, 2009).

Participants reported that the overall attitude of children can be described as:

The more guts I have, the stronger I appear to be and consequently others will be scared of me (i4).

This was evident in following responses (PQ28, i1, i5, i3), provided by the participants:

It almost works like this: The ruder you are or the more guts you have to do something towards another person or take something from someone, the more influence you have. The more things you do that are considered wrong, the more likely you are of becoming the leader of the group. That is how it works. The other boys work under the leader, because the leader is like the „general“ of the group. He's got the most guts and power to take things from others (i1) and [They] don't think much about the learners they bully. They feel strong when they bully them, because that is where they feel in control (PQ28).

Another participant stated that some children continuously attempt to do bad things, because it is a way of appearing „famous“ amongst other children in the school:

The ruder you are, the quicker are people going to know you and know about you which mean you are famous amongst the other children in the school. Then you are going to attempt to do more bad things so that you can be in the spotlight of the „cool“ children. This then, boosts your status (i3).

Previous research indicated similar findings where aggressive behaviour is associated with a higher status. In other words, children engage in aggressive behaviours in order to obtain authority. Those who are perceived as having the most power are usually the children who frequently engage in aggressive behaviours (Botha, 2014; Closson, 2008; Phillips, 2007; Vargas, 2011).

Participants reported that bullying other children often occurs on the school ground or places where other children can see it happening. They want to attract other people, because it adds to the feeling of power when other learners become scared as well:

They do it where people can see they do it. They will hurt someone so bad that those who are close by might get a bit scared, thinking I'm not going to seek trouble with that person, because he is going to hurt me even more ... They want people to be scared, because it makes them look aggressive. A lot of the children do it so others can see them and they might even have more friends because of it You can fight properly, you can hurt others, so I am going to be your friend, then you can fight my battles as well (i5).

In a study conducted by Phillips (2007) participants stated that fighting in public and especially winning fights forms part of the way in which children obtain authority over others. One of the respondents stated that fighting in public is just the way it works.

Salmivalli, Voeten and Poskiparta (2011) agree and indicated that children who bully other children often choose the time and place to initiate the fight so as to maximise their chances of demonstrating their power to other peers and are often successful in doing so.

Participants furthermore emphasised that children often target the younger grades and smaller children as a means to obtain power:

I am on the board of learners and I'm actually the youngest and smallest. Now I get some of the bigger classes, because I am in High school and the children often pick on me, because I am smaller and they are bigger than what I am. What is funny to them, if I am trying to quiet them down, they will laugh at me and say that I am

smaller than what they are, what am I trying to do, or why am I trying to quiet them down, because they are not going to listen to me. So this is often a challenge for me (i3).

Participants also indicated that sense of power can be obtained by demanding respect from younger children:

There are children who do not respect each other, especially the grade 12 children who wants respect from the grade 8 children and if the grade 8 children do not respect them, they will pick on them, because they are bigger and deserve respect even though they don't show respect in return (i3).

Research conducted by Craig and Pepler (2007) states that power can be obtained through various means such as having a physical advantage (height, weight and strength) or a higher social status and power by knowing the other's vulnerabilities (obesity, sexual orientation). The study conducted by Phillips (2007) participants indicated that although it they might target someone of the same age (or grade), the norm is to target the younger or smaller children. These learners are often perceived as weak and this therefore makes them easier targets.

Participants in the study emphasised that children who usually bully others tend to form part of the „cool group“. The participants further stated that if you are seen as being „cool“ you are able to attract the girls as the girls prefer to be associated with those who appear „strong“. This was evident in the following responses provided by the learners (PQ12, i4, i5):

The cool group is usually the ones who start it all. So most of the time we think that it is only the rude children that do it, but actually any child is capable to bully others. Like the cool group. They are THE group; they just want everybody to follow them. They want to make the decisions: You do this for me and if you don't want to do it, I'm going to show you what will happen, they threaten the children (i5).

Another participant stated that:

At school, there was always the „cool group“ that picked on me. (PQ12).

A grade 11 girl (participant) stated:

The Cool group- they want to appear like they are the „men“ (manne) on the school. Most girls like them, they might be top, perhaps not in their schoolwork, but outside, they hold a wicked attitude, they walk in groups and their attitude is one of „we are the aggressive ones, we are going to hurt everyone, everyone is scared of us“ and most girls like that type of guys -that boys can hit everyone in school, I am going to be involved with them (i5).

Participant 4 notes that:

A lot of the children come and sit with you, the girls like you, you are seen like the strongest in the school (i4).

Previous research concurs with these findings and states that power and dominance are some of the aspects that contribute toward a higher status in school (Botha, 2014; Closson, 2009; Dijkstra, Borch & Cillessen, 2012; Merten, 2004). Consequently, children

tend to engage in aggressive behaviours as a means to become more popular amongst their peers in the school. Merten (2004) states that the strong desire to appear popular might outweigh the need for stable, high quality friendships. The focus is therefore not on building healthy relationships, but rather on asserting power over others in order to obtain a higher status in school.

5.2.2.2 Subtheme: Exclusion based on group membership

Participants in the study emphasised that there are various kinds of groups in the school. Children who are good in sport are associated with being „cool“. Participants stated that those children who are not good in sport or who are not athletic are perceived as unpopular and are therefore excluded from the groups. Participants further reported that children who are excluded do not get acknowledged and people don't care about their existence. This was evident in the following response (i3):

It is often the popular girls in the class who are on their own or it is the A team netball girls that are on their own. They don't care about the others. Then on the other hand it is the unpopular children or the "nerds" that are on their own.

The same participant stated that:

At our school, and I think it is the same at other schools as well, if you play first team rugby or play for the first team in a girls sport, or you hang out with the popular children it tends to give you a higher status in school. This is bad for the smaller children or just the other „normal“ children, because they look down on you as if you are worth nothing (i3).

Another participant stated that you have to be good in either sport or academics. If you are not good in something, children are not really interested in getting to know you:

You have to be good in either sport or academics. If you are not good in either of them, then you are just another number. Nobody really wants to know you... They won't worry about you. They will ask your name, but won't ask further than that, because you have to prove yourself, prove that you are good in something, then they would want to know you (i4).

Research confirms these findings and states that perceived popularity tends to be associated with children who are troublemakers and aggressive. These children (especially boys) are described as „cool“ and athletic and studies suggest that the characteristics of these children are often valued by members of the groups (Botha, 2014; Vaillancourt & Hymel, 2006). Closson (2008) agrees and states that perceived popular individuals tend to participate in highly visible activities such as cheerleading or athletics. The study conducted by Closson (2008) which focused on childrens' perspectives of perceived popularity, showed that one of the most reported responses was that of being athletic is associated with high popularity.

Other participants in the study spoke more generally about the different kinds of groups and that members of the various groups prefer not to be associated with each other. Groups that they tended to refer to are „the nerds“, „the cool group“, „the brand group“ and children who are considered to be „plain“ or in the „middle“ (i3, i2). These are the children that are usually excluded from the popular groups:

If you don't belong to a particular group, the others won't care about your existence. It is almost like they don't even see you, because you are not part of this group and then you are probably a misfit. You belong nowhere, so you are on your own. They don't actually acknowledge you... Then there are also the boys who wear the best brand such as Nike, Adidas and so forth, they are on the one side. Then there is the boys that play A team and some of them also form part of the „brand group". Then it is the „nerds", the clever kids they are on their own. So they don't actually want to be associated with each other. We are in different groups, we don't actually care for another, we just say: „hallo" and „goodbye" (i3).

Another participant supported this view stating,

There are the cool people, the plain people and then just other children, so say for example you form part of the „cool" group, everybody will know who you are and they will greet you, but if you are considered „plain", then some people will sometimes greet you (i2).

Previous studies that have been conducted on popularity and status indicate that one of the qualities of the perceived popular groups cliques is that they are exclusionary (Closson, 2008; Closson, 2009). In other words, popular groups such as those who are perceived as being cool, wear expensive clothes and are athletic tend to exclude those children who don't share that similar status (Closson, 2008; Dijkstra, Borch & Cillessen, 2012). Research conducted by Dijkstra, Borch and Cillessen, (2012) stated that higher status peers tend to distance themselves from the less popular children as this might possibly influence their social status.

5.2.2.3 Subtheme: Competitiveness amongst groups

Participants in the study reported that the various groups (particularly the cool groups) also compete against each other in order to determine who is the strongest. By being the strongest group, they are then also perceived as the group with the most power and as the group that rules the school. Participants stated the following:

The groups also fight against each other, because the one group wants to be better than the other group (i1). For example there might be two „cool“ groups and they might want to compete against each other in touch rugby, soccer or cricket, so if there is a fight they will see/compete which of the two groups is the strongest. Then everybody will be scared of that group (group that won the fight), everybody might be scared of them and everyone will greet them. Everyone will know them. Then suddenly a person or few other people will say that they are not scared of the „cool“ group. The cool group might say: “Can you do something to us?” or something like that and then they will fight. If the cool group loses the fight, the group that won will then be the group that appears aggressive. It's almost like, they then rule the school (i2).

Not only do individuals within groups compete to climb the hierarchical ladder, but groups also compete with each other in order to gain status (Closson, 2009; Little, Rodkin & Hawley, 2007). According to a study conducted by Forber-Pratt, Aragon and Espelage (2013) bullies are often friends with one another and they also compete with each other to obtain the highest social status. Groups use aggression to compete for resources, through which they then establish and maintain dominance. Through competition, the social dominant

groups gain greater access to social or material resources (Closson, 2009; Little, Rodkin & Hawley, 2007; Vargas, 2011).

5.2.2.4 Subtheme: Violating the trust of friends

Adolescent friendships are considered to be central to social relationships and research indicates that having close and valued friendships provides opportunities to enhance social skills and build self esteem. Friendships also serve as information sources to oneself and others and involve mutuality, social support and intimacy (Bowker, 2004; Brinthaup & Lipka, 2002; Erwin, 1998; Rawlins & Holl, 1987).

In this study, participants reported that they value friendships, and tend to trust their friends with their secrets. Concurrently, they reported that their trust in friends has often been violated because friends disclosed their secrets.

Say I tell my friend a secret, if I do one thing wrong, my friend might go disclose my secret to someone else, saying: “yes, let me tell what happened at her house...”

Some...real friends might disclose secrets, like the girls, I can say that they do like fighting with each other. The two of us are friends; we are going to fight, because you bad mouth me at that other person (i5).

According to research conducted by Rawlins and Holl (1987), participants in the study referred to violation of trust as a friend who either discloses your secret to others or it can be a friend backstabbing you. Both of these were considered a betrayal and often the reason why friendships broke up. When such violation of trust occurs, friends experience intense negative

emotions such as sadness, anger and even despair and might possibly try and take revenge (Brinthaupt and Lipka, 2002).

Apart from disclosing secrets, participants also reported that gossiping also adds to the violation and lack of trust between friends (i5; i3):

Perhaps when friendships break up, then your friend might go to a different group...She will bad mouth her previous friends at this new group; Just be in and part of the group, they will say nasty things about others”(i5). With boys and girls it often occurs when there is gossiping and the other one found out about it. It is often the friends that will say “I won’t say anything”. Now say for example I am friends with both Sannie and Pietie, but now I listen to the gossip story that Sannie tells me and then I go to Pietie and tell Pietie what Sannie has told me. So both Pietie and Sannie trusted me and so I listen to the stories that both of them are telling me and then I reveal their secrets to each other. Then Pietie and Sannie will yell at each other and I don’t want to be involved so I stand back and pretend as if I don’t know anything (i3).

Another participant stated that the lack of trust between friends is another contributing aspect which makes bullying behaviour more likely to occur:

The big children makes it (bullying) very possible because there is always, like the children with the higher status they know there is someone that gossips about them...the will appoint one of their friends to go to other children and to pretend that they are their friend just to hear what they are gossiping and then go back to their friends (those with higher status) and then tell them what the other children had said. They will then approach the child who gossiped about them and say: “I know you

said this about me.” That is what makes it easy, because you never know who is trustworthy and therefore you don’t know who you can talk to. Your best friend can be friends with your worst enemy and gossip to them, so there is not a lot of trust amongst the children (i3).

Previous research on this topic is in agreement with these findings whereby gossip and more specifically negative gossip are seen as a violation of the expectancies of friendship. Within friendships there is the expectancy of loyalty and trust, so when friends gossip negatively about each other it is perceived as a violation of that trust (Watson, 2012).

5.2.3 Theme 3: Relational experiences of interactions in conflict situations

Relating and interacting in conflict situations refers to the way in which the members of the school community interact when there is conflict between individuals or groups of individuals in the school context, irrespective of whether this conflict is perceived as bullying or associated with a specific incident.

In this study, participants mainly referred to the apathy displayed by teachers, the encouragement of conflict by children and the maintenance of silence due to fear for retaliation and disagreements between parents and teachers.

5.2.3.1 Subtheme: Teachers display apathy in conflict situations

Participants in this study experienced that teachers displayed apathy in their interactions with children when conflict arose (i1, i5). According to children, teachers did not seem to consider dealing with conflict situations a part of their duty. The children stated:

Some teachers, when you tell them what has happened during break time, they might respond, saying something like: "I'm not the police or the principal." They only reason why he is there that day is to teach you" (i1).

A grade 11 participant stated that:

Sometimes the teachers avoid the children. There might be something that really hurt me that I want to tell the teacher about and then the teacher might say: "I don't have time for this now" (i5).

The findings correlate with findings of a South African study conducted by De Wet (2007) in which teachers admitted that they ignored bullying incidents. Joyce (2013) recently found that the principal and teachers either ignored or dismissed the reporting of incidents where conflict between children is involved. In another study conducted by Thomas (2012), the participants provided similar responses, indicating that no real measures were taken to deal with bullying incidents.

5.2.3.2 Subtheme: Children instigate and reinforce conflict

Participants in the study experienced a tendency amongst children to instigate conflict. One participant stated:

Everybody will be relaxed and then one learner might say: Hear this, did you hear what this man said about your mother; or hear what he is saying, he says you are

queer. See ,so then you get offended and stand up and ask this guy what he said and he then says that he did not say it, then the one who started it, says “yes he did say it” and then starts the fight (i2).

In a study conducted by Kerbs and Jolley (2007), some of the participants indicated that they experience excitement and fun to share information with other peers about bullying incidents and the people involved. One of the participants indicated that sharing such information with others, he possibly acts as an instigator which adds to the excitement of bullying incidents. Other research refers to the instigator as the „egger-on“ through which the learner provides the bully with continuous support and therefore encourages bullying incidents to occur (Englander, 2012).

Once the conflict is set off, the most likely response will be to encourage the conflict either through screaming, taking videos, laughing or joining in the fight:

Then they will fight and the person who started it will go and call more people to come and shout: “fight, fight” (i2).

The interest in the conflict between children seemingly creates an atmosphere that escalates the conflict:

If there is a fight, everybody leaves what they were currently busy with and run to see the fight. It is the bigger children that hit the smaller children and with this fight they attract people to come and see which in turn will make them more famous amongst the children. This is also when the fight will get out of hand, because some of the bystanders will join in the fight which then ends up in a bigger fight (i3).

A study conducted by Kerbs and Jolley (2007) agrees with these findings. Participants in this study reported that being observers of conflict situations creates a sense of excitement and fun. The crowd surrounding the fight is hyped up and excited. Bystanders reported that they reinforce bullying incidents because of the element of excitement. Some respondents stated that watching children fight is a guilty pleasure for them and therefore they are likely to encourage the conflict.

The participants' experience suggests that conflict has almost become a form of entertainment. The following brief excerpts from the data sets support this suggestion:

Like wild animals, everybody runs to come and see and screams. (PQ12); They take videos and send it around to everyone so that children's self-image can be broken down. (PQ12); Some children find it pleasurable, they will laugh. Most of the time they derive pleasure from it (i5). It is normal, no cares about the other. (PQ15); Children laugh, because they think it is funny (PQ20).

Kerbs and Jolley (2007) found that, according to the participants watching children fight is entertaining. The participants in their study noted that firstly it was entertaining because it breaks up the ordinary routine of the school day and secondly the participants compared fighting between children with watching a violent TV programme such as wrestling or a boxing match. It provided them with the same sense of entertainment.

5.2.3.3 Subtheme: Children maintain silent out of fear for retaliation

Participants experienced that children remain silent about incidents or threats relating to conflict amongst themselves, due to fear of being hurt (PQ15; i4; i2):

You can't tell a teacher, because if you tell, they are going to hurt you (i1). I want to help, but I am scared that they will hurt me (PQ15).

The learners notes that they will even leave a fellow learner who is scared alone, out of fear of retaliation:

There was a boy in my class. We bullied him, he got scared. At one stage we left him alone, because he was so scared (i4).

In other instances, the learners note that they will even participate in the bullying rather than take a stand:

They won't help the grade 8 learner; instead they will laugh, because they know he is scared of the grade 11 learner. They will just stand there, because they are scared, what if they hit us as well. So instead, they tease him, saying: "you can't fight"(i2).

Research on bullying in schools also indicates that the fear of retaliation is a common occurrence with regards to reporting bullying incidents in schools (Atlas &Pepler, 1998; Beane, 2005; Whitted & Dupper, 2005). The findings also clearly resonate with recent research conducted by Joyce (2013) in South Africa, and confirm that the fear of retaliation is a reality in South African school communities. Joyce (2013) found that participants stated that they are too scared to report bullying incidents as they fear they might be the next victim.

The participants experienced this fear of retaliation not only on the school premises but that they also feared that they would be targeted outside the school premises:

Not only are they scared that the learners will target them in school, but also outside, at their home- they hurt each other and when they return to school, it is almost like happened outside of school. Things happen like this: if I'm not going to get you at school, then there will be a time where I will get you at your house and I might come and hurt you, I will get you (i5).

Research conducted by Joyce (2013) and Forber-Pratt, Aragon and Espelage (2013) indicated the same findings in which participants reported that not only do they fear retaliation on the school grounds, but participants stated that they are scared that they will be targeted outside of the school premises such as walking to and from school. This study conducted by Joyce (2013) also indicated that children tended to stay away from school, because of the fear of being targeted.

5.2.3.4 Subtheme: Parent–teacher disputes about the management of conflict

Research participants experienced that teachers and parents tend to have disputes about the ways in which conflict situations are managed in schools (PQ19; PQ8; i5):

Parents and teachers disagree a lot. They yell at each other, because if a learner does something he is not supposed to do, the teacher phones the parents and it becomes a thing (PQ19). Some parents blame the teachers when something goes wrong (PQ8).

In other instances, parents do not agree with the way in which the teacher handled the conflict situation, indicating that they are not doing their job properly:

Some parents come to school then they don't want to know anything about what their child did. They yell at the teachers, they might make rude comments and say things such as: "the teachers aren't doing their job properly" (i5).

In some situations, the conflict between teachers and parents tends to escalate. Learner 3 stated that sometimes it reaches a point where:

Teachers and parents start to argue and they might hit each other with the fists (i3).

The responses provided by the participants are in agreement with the work of Sullivan (2004) who found that there is not shared understanding between the teachers, children and parents regarding ways to deal with conflict between children. There is also not a shared understanding regarding the rules and strategies to address incidents of bullying and there is confusion regarding the procedures that should be followed in a case of a bullying incident. Furthermore, the codes of conduct, which state that it is the educator's responsibility to take required action to ensure safety of children, contributes towards parents blaming the teachers, insinuating that they are not doing their jobs properly whenever conflict arises between children (De Wet, 2006).

Parents reportedly tend to deny their children's role in the conflict (PQ11; i3):

If children violate the rules and parents have to come in to school then it seems that the parents want to fight with the teachers, because their child is never wrong (PQ11). Some parents that are not very involved in the learner's school career are more withdrawn and they often don't want to hear that their child is not that compliant, angel child (i3).

Limited research has been conducted on parent-teacher disputes in managing conflict between children. However, in a study conducted by Holt, Kantor and Finkelhor (2009) it was evident that most children who are considered perpetrators of bullying incidents did not truthfully report this to their parents. The study therefore revealed that parents were not aware that their child might have been the instigator of a conflict situation. One can then assume that parents may deny their child's involvement, because of the lack of awareness. The study further indicated that parents who were indeed aware that their child was the instigator, but did not take any action, tends to be parents who were less involved and supportive.

5.3 Discussion of findings

The findings of this study were reported with reference to the everyday interactions between teachers and children, children and children, as well as in conflict situations. The findings will be discussed with reference to the themes and subthemes and existing literature in response to the two questions that guided this research, namely:

What are the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in secondary school contexts?

How do these relational experiences inform our understanding of the role that the interactions between members of the school community play in bullying behaviour in these contexts?

5.3.1 The relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in secondary school contexts

The findings indicate that the relationships between teachers and children often involve incidents in which reciprocal disrespect is displayed. The disrespectful interactions included swearing and yelling at each other, insulting one another and teachers who use corporal punishment when children do not abide by the rules. This tendency creates a concern regarding the way in which school communities ought to be. School communities should provide safe places for children, characterized by collaboration and care where children can develop to their full potential. However, the reciprocal disrespectful interactions between teachers and children appear to create a disabling dynamic within school communities where both teachers and children do not respect each other.

Furthermore, incongruent behaviour of teachers was reported by participants. The incongruent behaviour involved teachers treating children differently according to their moods, treating children differently because of an affiliation with parents (or caregiver) and treating children differently based on the child's appearance. This notion is confirmed in recent research literature in which Aydogan (2008) states that children are treated more positively if the teacher knows the parent(s) or caregiver. The study conducted by Aydogan (2008) further reported that teachers tend to favour physically attractive children above those children who they considered to be less attractive.

The relational experiences of children regarding the interactions between teachers and children further included attempts made by teachers to control children's behaviour. Such attempts included asserting power over children, using corporal punishment as a means to obtain and maintain discipline in the classrooms and threatening children with suspension if they misbehave. The use of corporal punishment raises a concern. According to Burton and

Leoschut (2013), teachers are supposed to be role models for children, but by using corporal punishment, teachers convey the message that it is acceptable to use force (physical or emotional) to deal with particular situations. Hence, children do not learn to resolve conflict in appropriate ways.

The participants in the study further reported that teachers tend to display a lack of interest in children. Some children described that when they want to share important matters with teachers, teachers tend to discard them and respond in a rude way. Children further experienced this lack of interest as „non-caring,“ leaving children with the feeling that they were „just another number“. This lack of interest appears to further contribute toward a disabling dynamic within school communities. Research by Kearney et al., (1991) and McDowell, (2011) suggests that when children experience teachers as non-caring, children tend to become more passive and have limited motivation to build positive relationships with teachers.

In the relational experiences of children regarding the interactions between children and children, the participants reported that children tended to assert power over one another as a means to obtain a higher status. Such behaviour included continuous rudeness toward one another, having a „macho“ attitude so that others will become increasingly fearful, engaging in physical fights in public places and targeting younger and smaller children. A serious concern about this way of interacting with one another is that children become more consumed with obtaining a higher status instead of building strong and valuable friendships.

Children also tend to exclude peers based on group membership. There is a tendency amongst children to exclude peers that are not part of or associated with the „*cool group*“. For example, those who excel in sport or act aggressively towards other children are considered to be cool and children who are considered to be „plain“ are disregarded.

Participants furthermore reported that there tends to be competition amongst the various groups in the school in order to determine which group is strongest and hence the coolest. Groups compete against each other by engaging in physical fights. Groups also compete against each other in sports. However, this competing in sports appeared to be unhealthy as participants indicated that competing in sports often lead to arguments and physical fights. Research confirms the above findings stating that not only do children compete against each other, but groups also tend to compete against other groups in order to obtain a higher status in the school (Closson, 2009; Little et al., 2007).

A further concern is that friends tend to violate the trust of one another. Violating the trust of friends included behaviours such as disclosing secrets to other peers, gossiping and spreading rumours. Essentially, children do not know who they can and cannot trust.

In terms of the relational experiences of children within conflict situations, participants reported that teachers tend to display apathy in conflict situations. Participants stated that teachers do not consider dealing with conflict as part of their duty. This is closely associated with teachers who do not show interest in the children and this seemingly creates a

non-caring attitude. This creates further problems as children become apprehensive about reporting bullying incidents, seeing that nothing gets done about it.

Within conflict situations, the participants reported that children often instigate, as well as reinforce conflict. Bystanders would either instigate conflict by spreading rumours, by cheering, screaming, taking videos or laughing. Bystanders also tended to join in the fight. Research conducted on bullying behaviour states that bystanders of bullying behaviour often find such incidents exciting and entertaining (Kerbs & Jolley, 2007).

On the other hand, children who participated in the study reported that most children remain silent out of fear of retaliation. Children do not want to report incidents of bullying because of the fear of being targeted not only on the school grounds, but outside of the school premises as well. What is concerning though is that even though children are afraid of reporting bullying incidents and some children want the conflict to stop, children also tend to instigate and reinforce conflict.

Furthermore, participants reported that there tends to be parent-teacher disputes when it comes to managing conflict. Blaming seems to be apparent amongst teachers and parents where teachers blame parents (or caregivers) for not disciplining their children or parents blame the teachers for not doing their job properly. The disputes between teachers and parents also involve parents who deny their child's role in the conflict. The disagreements between teachers and parents further contribute towards the disabling dynamic that exists within these school communities.

In summary, the findings of this study indicate that the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents involve reciprocal disrespect, incongruence, continuous rudeness, blaming, being silenced due to fear, betrayal of trust amongst friends, exclusion, competitiveness and lack of recognition and care.

5.3.2 Understanding the role that the interactions between members of the school community play in bullying behaviour in these contexts

In order to understand the phenomenon of bullying behaviour, deliberation of the findings on a deeper level clearly revealed that power struggles prevail between the members of these school communities. Power relations, as a set of actions that induce others to act in a particular manner, are present in all relationships (Foucault, 1982). These power relations can either enable people to actively participate in the co-construction of enabling contexts (Prilleltensky, 2001) or constrain people to act within a system (Richardson, 2000) and in the process create disempowering power dynamics (Nelson and Prilleltensky, 2004). Disempowering power dynamics are described by Allen (2008) as power relations between people whereby there is a struggle or confrontation. The struggle stems from the need of one or more individuals to get others to do what they want them to do. Dysfunctional power dynamics therefore imply a lack of mutual recognition of all parties involved.

The findings of this study suggest that due to disempowering power dynamics, the members of these school communities are constrained in their interactions with each other, as will be illustrated with reference to the identified relational experiences.

In the interactions between the teachers and the children, some children assert power by not adhering to the rules and respond disrespectfully by swearing at the teachers, talking back, not listening and walking out of the classroom without permission to do so. Concurrently, teachers retaliate by yelling, insulting and swearing. Some teachers also hit the children. These interactions clearly suggest a power struggle between these members. These teachers seemingly contribute to this disrespectful interactive dynamic by maintaining control over the class from an authoritarian position rather than through positive, healthy relationships with the children. In the process, a continuing cycle of revenge, in which children seem to challenge the power position of teachers by not adhering to the rules and responding disrespectfully and in turn teachers retaliate with disrespect, has developed in these schools.

In the interactions between children, the power struggle became evident in the continuous rudeness that included swearing at and insulting each other, degrading each other and engaging in physical fights. Some of the participants reported that these interactions occur on a daily basis, which suggests that this way of interacting might have become the norm rather than the exception in these secondary school communities. In view of the apparent shift, there seems to be a tendency amongst children to either act rudely or at least pretend to be rude as indicated in situations where bullying is encouraged by those who do not necessarily participate in the bullying incidents. Having power over others has become a „safe space“ for children. If children are rude and aggressive towards others, they seemingly gain a sense of power, which indicates that they are strong and untouchable, and this therefore keeps them safe from harm. By not being rude, a child is exposed as vulnerable,

which is a quality the children cannot afford if they want to survive. By being vulnerable or caring children become an easy target.

The children who prefer not to act according to the „norm“ seem to keep quiet out of fear for retaliation as indicated in instances where there is conflict between members. Children are very apprehensive about reporting bullying because this means they are likely to become targets of bullying. In order to be kept safe from harm they have to remain silent. However, by being silent they actually become powerless, while those who do not maintain silent remain in power positions. Based on Stacey's theory of complex responsive processes of relating (2003) children make meaning of their experiences according to their capacity to respond which in turn relies heavily on the history of previous interactions. The concern therefore is that children will most likely continue to respond either by being rude, pretending to be rude or by supporting those who are rude to obtain some degree of power. The power children obtain keeps them safe or they might remain silent as if nothing ever happened, because this way their chances of not also becoming a target of bullying might be slightly better. The power struggle as displayed in the interactions between children therefore facilitates a space in these school communities that perpetuates bullying behaviour since children are left with very limited options to respond due to the fact that the power struggles are not challenged.

The serious nature of the dysfunctional dynamics generated through these power struggles is evident in the way in which the trust of friends is violated in these school communities. These violations include disclosing friends' secrets and gossiping. Although some participants reported that they value friendships because it provides the space for

sharing personal information, the need to be perceived as cool and popular (i.e. powerful), seems to outweigh the need for healthy and supportive friendships. Gossiping and disclosing their friends' secrets appears to be a way for children to form part of the more „powerful“ groups which again suggests that this appears to be a „safe place“ for children. Their limited capacity to respond seemingly „forces“ children to respond in alternative ways such as gossiping and disclosing secrets with the intention to appear more powerful. A serious concern regarding this tendency is the fact that some children seem to regard being popular more important than healthy and supportive friendships to the extent that they will even turn against their own friends, as also found by Merten (2004).

The power struggle between children also plays out in the way that the different groups in the schools compete against each other as a means to gain status. According to the findings, there seems to be a tendency amongst the perceived popular groups to constantly challenge each other as a means to either climb the hierarchal ladder or as a means to maintain their current power position. The ways in which groups tend to compete against each other are often through physical fights. Through fighting with each other, particularly in public places, these groups are provided with the opportunity to demonstrate their power in front of their peers. The group that „wins“ the fight is perceived as the strongest and therefore gains a higher-status.

In instances where conflict occurs in these school communities, a power struggle between parents and teachers seems evident in the ways in which they blame each other for the child's behaviour. The parents blame the teachers for not doing their job properly and teachers blame the parents for not appropriately disciplining their child at home. This power

struggle, tends to provide children with the opportunities to play the adults off against one another. While parents and teachers are arguing about the children's behaviours, children observe these interactions and know exactly which way to lean so as to remain out of trouble, which further allows them to continue with the conflict and remain in power.

The power struggles between the members of these school communities are aggravated by the exclusion of certain children or groups of children. Exclusion as a relational pattern was identified in both the teacher- learner relationship and the learner- learner relationships. Teachers tend to act incongruently by favouring certain children, thus excluding others. The incongruence apparently results in anger and frustration for those who are excluded. Due to these negative feelings children have towards teachers and based on their limited capacities to respond, they tend to retaliate by acting disrespectfully toward teachers. In this way, the interactions associated with exclusion contributes to the power struggle between teachers and children in these school communities.

Children exclude one another based on their group membership. Apparently children who are considered „plain“ or in the „middle“ tend to be excluded from the so called „cool“ or „popular groups“. Children seemingly exclude peers to avoid comprising their perceived social status, while those who are excluded attempt to be included by pretending to be „cool“.

The findings furthermore suggest that the lack of care and recognition experienced in these school communities contribute to the power struggles between members of the school community. For example, the lack of interest and apathy from teachers creates a dynamic

whereby children experience that teachers do not care about them and respond by being disobedient.

The parent-teacher disagreements indicate that due to the absence of a shared understanding regarding ways to resolve conflict they assert power in a dysfunctional manner by blaming each other for children's" misbehaviour instead of collaborating to solve the problems. Evidently, both teachers and parents appear to be more concerned about the positions they hold than about caring for children by finding appropriate ways to resolve conflict between children.

The apparent lack of connectedness between children is further strengthened by not knowing who they can trust. Therefore instead of developing strong connections with peers where children support and care for each other, they tend to engage in behaviour that creates distance between them. Due to this lack of care and connectedness between children and spaces in which children interact with each other, the relationships between them are restrained even further as suggested by complex interactive dynamic theories (Jörg, 2004; Stacey, 2003; Spretnak, 2009).

Although the findings were presented separately, exploring the findings through the lens of complexity, it becomes clear that all the elements within a system are interrelated and in the elements in the system shape and are being shaped at the same time. The interactions between children, teachers and parents create a dynamic of power in which there is a constant power struggle between the members in the school community. More subtlety, the interactions between them further creates a dynamic of exclusion as well as a lack of

recognition and care for children. These aspects interact dynamically with each other where power-plays between members in these school communities influences exclusion, care and recognition and at the same time exclusion, care and recognition influences the dynamic of power that exists between members of the school community.

Viewed from a systemic-developmental perspective the findings clearly concur with the insights that bullying behaviour should be understood in terms of the social ecology within the system (third variable), as suggested by Atlas and Pepler (1998) who emphasise the importance of the social networks within the school community. Evidently the serious power struggles have become a way of being together for some teachers, children and parents. These interactions generate on-going cycles of revenge that seems to have become an acceptable way of interacting between people in these contexts and therefore goes unchallenged.

The findings furthermore concur with both the systemic–developmental model as well as the complex interactive dynamic systems perspective (Stacey, 2003; Sprenak, 2009), in as far as relationships between people, are viewed as critically important if we intend to facilitate change in school contexts. Focussing on the relationships between people it becomes evident that a disabling interactive dynamic that contributes to the occurrence of bullying behaviour emerges from the interactions between teachers, children and parents in these school communities. If we take into consideration that the conversations between the teachers, children and parents in these schools apparently are shaped by reciprocal disrespect, continuous rudeness and blaming, it seems inevitable that bullying behaviour will prevail in these contexts, since it is the reciprocal influence (and the strength of the influence) on which

the quality of the relationships between the members of the school communities is established.

The complex interactive dynamic systems perspective (Stacey, 2003; Jorg, 2004; 2009) furthermore suggests that meaning is not necessarily in the information we share, but rather in the way we respond to each other. The meaning that teachers, children and parents attach to their experiences is based on the ways in which they respond to each other. As indicated members of these school communities tend to respond to each other in disrespectful and even aggressive ways which suggests a power struggle between members in the school community. From this perspective, the continuous rudeness experienced by children influences the kind and quality of the relationship they have with each other. Children respond differently to these interactions which creates the space for the power dynamic to come into play (unequal distribution of power) between the children. Stacey (2003) further argues that the way in which people respond to each other relies heavily on the history of their interactions. The continuous rudeness between children which is a daily occurrence therefore allows for a space to be created within which one could expect a power struggle between children.

From complexity perspective exclusion is not something that can be noticed by exploring the behaviours of individuals, but rather, by exploring the interactions between individuals we become aware of the dynamic of exclusion that exists between teachers and children and between children and children. With regard to the teacher-learner relationships, it is not the teacher who has an influence on the learner, but rather it is the interactions (being incongruent and favouring children) that shapes children's experience of the teacher.

Children make sense of their experiences according to their capacities to respond, and based on these findings children experience a feeling of exclusion from the teacher. Similarly, the dynamic of exclusion that is created between children is based on the ways in which they interact and respond to each other and not on the influence they have on each other.

In the same way, the lack of care and recognition experienced by children only becomes evident when we explore the interactions between members in the school community. Caring (and the lack thereof) which is a relational aspect that exists between two or more individuals therefore necessitates an approach that focuses on in the interactions between individuals and in the social networks in which they are embedded.

The notion that we influence and are being influenced by those that form part of our social networks further guides us to better understand the dynamic of exclusion that exist between children (Morrison, 2002; Stacey, 2003). In the interactions between peers, the children are influenced to reject other children as their peers, so as to remain in a position of power. Children who are excluded run the risk of becoming easy targets and thus they are influenced by the power dynamic to constantly try and find ways to form part of the more powerful groups.

Although the findings in previous chapter were presented separately, exploring the findings through the lens of complexity, it becomes clear that all the elements within a system are interrelated and in which the elements in the system shape and are being shaped at the same time. The interactions between children as well as between teachers and parents, creates a dynamic of power in which there is a constant power struggle between the members in the

school community. More subtly, these interactions further creates a dynamic of exclusion as well as a lack of recognition and care for the children. These aspects interact dynamically with each other where power-plays between members in these school communities influences exclusion, care and recognition and at the same time exclusion, care and recognition influences the dynamic of power that exists between members of the school community.

Viewed from a well-being perspective, it is important to take note of the way in which well-being in all three the sites identified by Prilleltensky (2005), are influenced by the occurrence of bullying behaviour – not only will the relational well-being of children be influenced, but it also constrains opportunities for personal and collective well-being. For example, the lack of care and recognition experienced by children refers to a source of relational well-being. The lack of care and recognition for each other is likely to influence the personal well-being of children where children tend to experience isolation, depression and poor academic performance as suggested by current literature on bullying (Anderson, 2007; Beane, 1999; Darney, 2009; Witted & Dupper, 2005; Woods et al., 2009). With regard to the collective well-being, the lack of care and recognition contributes toward a disabling interactive dynamic, not only between children, but also within the school community.

Instead of building positive connections, the school community constantly engages in a battle for power where unequal distribution of power is evident and in turn allows these behaviours to persist. Based on the work of Maher, Zins and Elias (2007), it appears that a culture of intimidation exists amongst children. With the absence of adults and adult structure, adults inadvertently and unknowingly allow for spaces to be created which are characterized by social power amongst children. It appears that the children who are in these positions of power rule the school; these children are considered popular and admirable by both teachers

and peers while those who attempt to 'fight back' are not only at risk for further harassment by peers, but are also unfairly punished by school authorities.

Through exploring bullying from these various perspectives, it has created great awareness that the root of bullying possibly lies in the power dynamics created through the interactions between members in the school communities. The constant power struggles between members of these school communities seems to produce fertile ground for bullying to occur and to persist. Previous research has mainly addressed bullying from a positivist, linear perspective and through which they have emphasised the need to protect the victim and punish the bully. Little attention has been paid to the interactions between all members of the school communities and the social networks in which they are embedded. Although previous research has mentioned the imbalance of power between the „bully“ and victim“ there is very little research and in-depth discussions, especially within the South African context regarding the importance and role of power in the phenomenon of bullying.

The study has therefore made a contribution regarding the need to include power dynamics when exploring bullying in school communities.

CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the study is concluded with a brief overview of the research process, followed by the conclusions drawn from the findings of the study. Thereafter the limitations will also be indicated and recommendations will be made with reference to research and practice.

6.2 Brief overview of the research

Schools need to be safe spaces for all involved. However, in the South African contexts bullying behaviour in schools has increased to the extent that both children and teachers are becoming increasingly fearful. Due to the increased violence, schools are no longer considered safe places where children can enjoy themselves, build healthy and positive relationships and engage in effective learning. Research by Ncontsa and Shumba (2013) suggests that teachers might even spend more time trying to solve problems relating to violence than on effective teaching and learning.

Based on an overview of the South African research literature, bullying behaviour in this context is mainly perceived from an individualistic perspective. From this perspective, individuals are labelled, either bully, victim or bystander and characteristics of people are viewed as contributing to their position in these incidents. The individualistic perspective constrains our understanding of bullying behaviour in as far as the focus is limited to the behaviour of individuals, without

considering the complex interactive dynamic nature of human interaction.

Pepler and Craig (2008) argues that bullying behaviour through this singular approach limits our perspective on bullying behaviour. In response, these authors suggest a *binocular perspective* that adds a second lens namely the social dynamics in peer groups as well as the role that adults play in shaping children experiences. In this study, the binocular perspective informed by the systemic-developmental model in combination with a complexity perspective on human behaviour, was taken on the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents.

The following research questions were asked in an effort to contribute to the body of knowledge aimed at understanding and addressing bullying behaviour by challenging current explanations for the escalation of bullying behaviour.

What are the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in secondary school contexts?

How do these relational experiences inform our understanding of the role that the interactions between members of the school community play in bullying behaviour in these contexts?

To answer these questions a qualitative phenomenological research design was applied to explore the meaning that children contribute to their experiences. The data was collected in two phases: Firstly, thirty three learners from three secondary schools completed written assignments- consisting of an open-ended question and incomplete sentences. Secondly, six children were selected based on their responses in phase 1 to represent multiple

voices regarding the phenomenon. These children were invited to participate in semi-structured individual interviews. The two data sets were analysed, using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

The findings were disseminated with reference to the relational experiences on various levels of interrelatedness. The participants' relational experiences with regards to their involvement in bullying incidents gave rise to findings that revealed that the children who were involved in bullying incidents experience that the relationships between the members of their school communities are to a large extent restrained due to the negative interactions between them. The findings were reported with reference to three main themes, namely:

- Relational experiences of interactions between teachers and children;
- Relational experiences of interactions between children;
- Relational experiences of interactions in conflict situations.

With reference to the relationships between teachers and children, the subthemes indicated that interactions between them often include reciprocal disrespect, incongruent ways of dealing with challenges; attempts to control the behaviour of children and a lack of interest in children.

With reference to the relationships between children and children, the participants' experiences showed that children assert power over peers as a means to obtain a high status,

to exclude others based on group membership and due to competitiveness between groups. It was also noted that this assertion of power causes a violation of trust between friends.

Within conflict situations, participants experienced that teachers tend to be apathetic, children instigate and reinforce conflict, children remain silent out of fear of retaliation and there tends to be parent-teacher disputes in terms of managing conflict. Based on these experiences children do not feel safe in their school communities.

6.3 Conclusions to the study

The conclusion drawn from the findings of this study are discussed with reference to the role everyday interactions between people, the capacity of teachers to deal with bullying behaviour, the relationship between parents and teachers in dealing with conflict and the power dynamics at play in these specific contexts. Further conclusions will be presented with reference to the current ways in which bullying behaviour is understood and addressed in South African school communities. Due to the explorative nature of the study, the conclusion should not be perceived as absolute but rather as tentative patterns that can guide further exploration of the phenomenon from a relational well-being perspective.

6.3.1 Conclusions based on the relational experiences of the children in the specific contexts

- Relationships are restrained on various levels of interrelatedness in these school communities

The research revealed that the ways in which people interact with one another on a daily basis in these school communities as social contexts play a significant role in restraining relationships as suggested by the theory of complex responsiveness process of relating (Stacey, 2003; 2007; Shaw, 2002) and the complex interactive dynamic systems perspective (Jörg, 2009; Spretnak, 2011). Although it cannot be concluded that these school communities are experienced as disabling by all the members, it is certainly evident that children who were involved in bullying incidents experience these contexts as disabling due to interactions that suggest reciprocal disrespect, incongruence, strict control of their behaviour combined with an apathy that indicates a lack of care and recognition for some children displayed by teachers in these contexts. Within these disabling contexts, relationships are further constrained through the daily interactions between children that include the exclusion of their peers, unhealthy competition amongst them and the violation of the trust between friends.

- Teachers seem to have limited capacity to deal with the complex interactive dynamics associated with bullying behaviour

With reference to the ways in which teachers respond to challenges posed regarding ways to deal with bullying behaviour, it is concluded that teachers might not have the capacity to deal with the complex interactive dynamics associated with bullying behaviour and even with human behaviour in general. They therefore tend to either avoid or control the behaviour of children when conflict arises. In some cases they choose to control behaviour and in some instances they even use corporal punishment. By threatening children as a means to control children's behaviour and the use of corporal punishment teachers unknowingly contribute toward the disabling dynamic that exists within these school communities. According to

the complex responsiveness process of relating theory (Stacey, 2003; 2007; Shaw, 2002), teachers deal with children's behaviour according to their capacity to respond, often responding in disrespectful, aggressive and apathetic ways. These ways of interacting with children, further restrains the relationships between teachers and children. In terms of dealing with conflict behaviour, teachers do not seem to take responsibility in dealing with bullying behaviour. The implication is that they do not consider that they play a role in the interactive dynamics that underpins the bullying behaviour. As indicated within the research findings, teachers tend to display apathy in dealing with conflict situation. This way of responding to children contributes toward the disabling dynamic within the school communities. Children feel that teachers do not care and in turn respond in ways that allows conflict to persist. Furthermore, children are not guided in terms of how to relate and interact with one another in ways that promote and encourage healthy positive relationships, since teachers as already indicated, appear to lack the knowledge and skills in terms of dealing with human behaviour.

- Divides between parents and teachers jeopardize attempts to find solutions to the problem of bullying

Considering the ways in which the teachers and parents respond to one another in these contexts, it is concluded that there are clear divisions between them that might jeopardise their collaborative efforts to find solutions to the problem of bullying in schools.

As indicated within the research findings, the divide between teachers and parents stems from the need of both parties to be in control and to remain in a position of power. As a result, parents and teachers tend to blame one another for the problems that exist between the children and for not dealing with such situations effectively. The disputes between parents

and teachers therefore prevent them for finding collaborative solutions pertaining to conflict situations that exist between children.

6.3.2 Conclusions regarding our understanding bullying behaviour in school communities

Considering the findings, the researcher came to the conclusion that disenabling power dynamics can be understood as, a continued struggle between people to maintain a sense of power over others and underpins the current prevalence of bullying behaviour in schools. These power dynamics involve all the members of the school community in on-going conflict between individuals and groups of individuals who assert themselves in dysfunctional ways in school communities. Teachers and children, as well as parents contribute to the dysfunctional power dynamics through their everyday interactions with one another.

Fear apparently plays a significant role sustaining the power dynamics as people remain silent out of fear for retaliation. Children do not want to report incidents of bullying because of the fear of being targeted, not only on the school grounds, but outside of the school premises as well.

Based on people's need to remain in position of power, a dynamic of exclusion seems to exist within the teacher-learner and learner-learner relationship. The interactive dynamic of exclusion, which becomes evident through our exploration of the daily interactions between members of the school communities, appears to intensify the power struggles that exist

between teachers and children and between children and children. Exclusion as a relational pattern between members in the school communities therefore further deepens our understanding regarding the phenomenon of bullying.

The ways in which members in the school communities relate and interact with one another further suggested that children tend to experience a lack of care and recognition. The lack of care and recognition aggravates the power struggles that exist between the members in these school communities. Due to the lack of care and recognition children seem to become involved in conflict situations as a means to be recognised by others, despite that such attempts are considered disabling.

It can be concluded that in our efforts to address bullying behaviour it will therefore be critically important to facilitate deep and serious conversation on the dysfunctional power dynamics if we intend to facilitate first order change understood as change that does not merely address the symptoms of bullying as a phenomenon but intends to change the relationships between people in the context.

6.3.3 Conclusion regarding way in which bullying behaviour is addressed

The current individualist and punitive approaches to dealing with bullying behaviour in South African school communities do not seem to resolve the problem of bullying in schools. The singular focus on the behaviour of individuals is not sufficient since we act in relation to others and through our interactions we shape and are being shaped in a self-organising way through processes over which we have no control (Jörg, 2004; Shaw 2002).

However, as indicated in section 2.7 of the study, schools tend to focus on policies and codes of conduct in an attempt to deal with bullying behaviour. This tendencies imply interactions that are associated with strict control of people's behaviour that contribute to disempowering power dynamics instead of facilitating enabling spaces, since human behaviour cannot be controlled (Stacey, 2003).

Concurrently, due to being ill-equipped to understand bullying behaviour as a relational problem, teachers do not effectively intervene when bullying occurs. Instead, they tend to and are often expected to immediately report incidents to those who are higher on the hierarchical ladder who have more power but do not necessarily have insight into the conflict that prevails between those involved in the bullying incident. The need for more specific interventions to address bullying behaviour seems evident. However, in instances where interventions aimed at addressing behaviour is implemented in school communities it is recommended that the impact of these interventions to ensure that it has an effect.

Based on the above-stated, it is concluded that we should proceed to a more relationship-orientated approach to bullying behaviour as argued by Kitching, Roos and Ferreira (2012). These authors state that merely attending to the behaviour of individuals who are labelled as bullies or victims, without taking the interactions between people in the broader social context into consideration, will not be sufficient to contribute to a proactive solution to address the problem of bullying in South African school communities.

What is needed therefore to effectively address bullying behaviour in schools is an understanding that individuals as relational beings are involved in social networks in which bullying behaviour emerges in the complex responsive interactive processes of relating and interacting between teachers, children and parents on and across various levels of interrelatedness.

6.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

6.4.1 Recommendations for practice

In concurrence with recommendations by Kitching (2010), it is recommended that by adopting a relationship-focussed approach schools will be enabled to find ways in which they can promote positive and healthy relationships between members in school communities that will provide a basis for addressing the challenges relating to bullying behaviour in a more sustainable way. The approach requires proactive involvement of the members in the school communities with the aim of strengthening relationships between all members in these communities. To implement such an approach effectively, Kitching (2010) suggests that all members in the school community should actively engage in conversational processes that are open and spontaneous. Such dialogues include teachers, parents, children and other staff members thus providing the opportunity for all members to be heard. In having these continuous conversations, members in the school communities are better able to identify ways of relating and interacting that contributes toward enabling school communities. Furthermore, by engaging in these conversational processes school communities will gain a deeper understanding regarding the relational patterns that contribute toward nurturing relationships in these school communities. Facets of interrelatedness that should form part of these conversational processes should include connectedness, care, respect, responsibility, communication and power. Reflecting on these facets will generate a greater awareness of the ways in which members relate and interact with one another that contributes toward nurturing and restrained relationships.

Based on the researchers own experiences in school contexts the following practical suggestions might be applied to facilitate these conversations. School communities need to address the power struggles that exist between all members seeing that power contributes toward a disabling dynamic. For example, assembly can be a great way of having an open discussion with children about human behaviour and the ways in which children interact with one another that addresses the issue of the power struggles that exist between individuals and group of individuals. Having such open discussions will facilitate a greater awareness regarding the everyday ways of relating and interacting.

Schools communities should also consider making use of a coordinator that can facilitate the dysfunctional dynamics between children in order to assist with the effective resolution of conflict situations.

School communities can supply children with a „PS box“ (problems and suggestions). This system allows children who are experiencing certain relationship problems, problems pertaining to incidents of conflict or have any suggestions regarding ways of how to encourage nurturing relationships, to drop a letter in the PS box.

Violence is a topic which is addressed in Life Orientation. These lessons can therefore include discussions about violence, children's experiences regarding violence in their school as well as interactions between children and children and teachers that might possibly lead to conflict situations. Collaborative discussions in Life Orientation can be held with children regarding ideas and suggestions of how to deal with these restraining relationships between members in the school community.

6.4.2 Recommendations regarding policy development

Policies within school communities should not merely focus on addressing problem behaviour through punitive ways. Instead, as suggested by Kitching, Roos and Ferreira (2012) policies should focus on facets that contribute toward enabling school communities. Policies ought to make a shift toward focusing on the recognition of positive behaviour and interactions instead of merely focusing on the negative. Such policies should further encourage collaborative proactive discussions between all members in the school community regarding everyday ways of relating and interacting. This will facilitate a deeper understanding regarding the interactive dynamics that underpins restraining and nurturing relationships in school communities.

Due to the lack of consensus within school communities and confusion of teachers regarding the way in which bullying behaviour should be dealt with, teachers should be able to attend short training courses regarding ways to deal with bullying behaviour in more effective ways. Training courses should focus on the interactive dynamics between members in the school communities, especially pertaining to the interactive dynamics that underpins bullying behaviour. In cases where teachers feel uncertain about how to address particular bullying incidents, support and guidance needs to be provided for them.

Instead of merely dealing with bullying behaviour in punitive ways, principals and teachers ought to consider the relationships between children and how the interaction between members in the school community contributes toward bullying behaviour. Qualified

persons such as counsellors or psychologists should assist and support school communities in this regard.

Appropriate systems should be put in place that will make children feel more safe and comfortable to report incidents of bullying. Based on the research findings, children do not feel safe to report bullying out of fear of retaliation. Measures should be taken where children can openly discuss such incidents with teachers or other staff members at the school without worrying that teachers will dismiss them.

6.4.3 Recommendations for future research

Research on bullying behaviour should shift from exploring bullying behaviour from a positivist perspective toward exploring bullying behaviour from a social constructionist perspective. Research on bullying behaviour should address the relationships between all members in schools communities as a means to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of bullying. Furthermore, as suggested by the Systemic-developmental model, research should also consider the social contexts in which bullying behaviour unfolds.

Based on the research findings, the power struggles between members in these school communities seems to allow for bullying behaviour to unfold. Although research within the South African context mentions the unequal distribution of power relating to bullying behaviour, there is no research that provides in depth discussions of power struggles between members of school communities and how the role of power influences the manifestation of bullying behaviour.

6.5 Limitations of the study

The following limitations need to be noted:

A limited number of children were involved in the research. The reasons for this were as follows: due to the requirement that participants should have recently been involved in bullying incidents, the number of possible participants was restricted. Secondly, children were not allowed to be withdrawn from academic activities during the school day. In the context in which the research was conducted very few learners could stay after school. Consequently, the researcher relied on very limited periods of time to involve children in the research. However, despite the limited number of participants involved, deep, rich data was captured through the in-depth engagement with the children in the three school communities.

Due to the strict regulations and ethical codes in terms of entrance to schools, observation of behaviour between members in these school communities was limited. Ideally, it would have been valuable to observe the behaviour of the various role-players in school communities. Observing the daily interactions between members in the school communities is likely to enhance our understanding regarding the phenomenon of bullying. Observing behaviour provides the opportunity to explore the ways of relating and interacting between teachers and children and between children and children and essentially guides us to understand the dynamics that are created within the interactions and the specific contexts. Instead, the findings of the study were reported in a narrative form as a means to obtain an understanding regarding the way in which participants create meaning in their relational experiences in terms of their involvement in bullying incidents.

Due to the limited extent of this study only three schools that are homogenic in nature were approached. However, the sample that was selected was heterogenic in nature in that it included both boys and girls and also included different perspectives regarding children involvement in bullying incidents (either as the person accused of bullying, the person that has been bullied or as the bystander of a bullying incident). Approaching schools that are more heterogenic in nature might have broadened the possibility of applying the findings in the South African context.

In view of the complex interactive dynamic theories the voices of teachers and parents should also be considered in order to obtain a comprehensive picture regarding the ways in which members of these school communities relate and interact with one another. The researcher therefore acknowledges that this study is a baseline exploration of the relational experiences of children involved in bullying incidents in secondary school communities.

6.7 A final word

The study contributes to a greater awareness of the complexity of bullying behaviour as a phenomenon. In order to comprehensively understand the phenomenon of bullying, we therefore need to explore the relationships between all members in school communities instead of merely focussing on those involved in the incidents. By exploring the daily interactions between all members in school communities we will become more aware of the relational patterns and interactive dynamics that exist between these members in school communities, which will in turn inform our practices aimed at addressing this phenomenon in a more integrated manner. In our on-going conversations

about the complex interactive dynamics that are created in the interaction between people, new ways can be developed of addressing the challenge of escalating bullying in South African school communities.

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