

# Developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities

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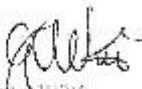
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To whom it may concern

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I, GRETEL WÜST, do hereby confirm that I did a full language edit on the doctoral dissertation of Jeanne Brown entitled, 'Developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities.'



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## SUMMARY

This research project was aimed at developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners. A lack of school readiness was identified as one factor contributing to the high number of learners dropping out of school. In South Africa where only 50% of learners who enter the formal school system, reach Grade 12, the problem of unemployment persists and the cycle of poverty is perpetuated. On the other hand, completing education successfully leads to marketable skills and prosperity for the individual as well as for the country as a whole.

School readiness is described in literature as a multi-dimensional concept including cognitive skills as well as social and emotional skills and it is generally accepted that children need to be school ready in all these domains of development in order to integrate successfully into the school system. The role of parents as key role players in children's immediate ecosystem, was identified as of critical significance in the development of school readiness. Focus group discussions with role players in the two target communities revealed serious socio-economic challenges affecting the quality of parenting and the lives of the children living in these communities. It was also found that there are significant deficits in parenting behaviours impacting negatively on the development of school readiness.

In order to develop a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners, the six steps of intervention research were applied. The research was qualitative in nature and a philosophical paradigm of social constructivism was followed. Three main components of parenting were identified and addressed through twelve topics. The prototype was developed around these topics and each session included a variety of activities addressing all the aspects of school readiness. An important aspect of the intervention programme was that the Grade R learners participated together with their parents in the activities. The programme was implemented in three schools. Minor changes were made to the prototype and the programme was repeated in one target school the following year.

Thirteen interviews with participating parents indicated that the programme had been successful in reaching its aim and objectives. The parents indicated that they had improved in three important areas of parenting impacting on school readiness, namely parent-child relationship, interaction between parent and children and creating a home learning environment. The research was successful in proving that a parenting skills programme can develop and improve parenting behaviours that lay the foundation for the development of school readiness.

Key words: school readiness, early childhood development, social development, emotional development, parents, parenting programme, socio-economic problems, poverty.

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie navorsingsprojek was gerig op die ontwikkeling van 'n oerleidingprogram om die skoolgereedheid van graad R-leerders te verbeter. 'n Gebrek aan skoolgereedheid is geïdentifiseer as 'n faktor wat bydra tot die hoë aantal leerders wat die skool vroeg verlaat. In Suid-Afrika waar slegs 50% leerders wat begin skoolgaan, graad 12 bereik, word die probleem van werkloosheid en die siklus van armoede voortgesit. Aan die ander kant, kan suksesvolle voltooiing van die skoolloopbaan lei tot vaardighede wat bemark kan word en voorspoed vir die individu, en vir die hele land.

Skoolgereedheid word in die literatuur beskryf as 'n multi-dimensionele begrip wat kognitiewe vaardighede sowel as sosiale en emosionele vaardighede insluit. Dit word algemeen aanvaar dat kinders skoolgereed moet wees in al hierdie dimensies van ontwikkeling ten einde suksesvol tot die formele skoolsisteem toe te tree. Die rol van ouers, as sleutel-rolspelers in die kind se onmiddellike ekosisteem, is geïdentifiseer as van kritiese belang in die ontwikkeling van skoolgereedheid. Fokusgroepbesprekings met rolspelers in die twee teikengemeenskappe het onthul dat daar ernstige sosio-ekonomiese uitdagings in die gemeenskappe is wat die lewenskwaliteit van die ouers en kinders in hierdie gemeenskappe beïnvloed. Daar is ook gevind dat daar betekenisvolle gebreke in ouerlike gedrag was wat 'n negtiewe impak het op die ontwikkeling van skoolgereedheid.

Ten einde 'n oerleidingprogram te ontwikkel wat die skoolgereedheid van graad R-leerders verhoog, is die ses stappe van intervensienavorsing toegepas. Die navorsing was kwalitatief van aard en 'n filosofiese paradigma van sosiale konstruktivisme is gevolg. Drie hoofkomponente van ouerlike gedrag is geïdentifiseer, sowel as twaalf onderwerpe om hierdie komponente aan te spreek. 'n Prototipe is ontwikkel rondom hierdie onderwerpe en elke sessie het 'n verskeidenheid van aktiwiteite wat gerig is op verskillende aspekte van skoolgereedheid, ingesluit. 'n Belangrike aspek van die program was dat ouers en hul graad R-kinders saam betrek is by die program. Die program is in drie skole toegepas. Geringe veranderinge is aan die prototipe aangebring en die program is die volgende jaar herhaal in een van die teikenskole.

Dertien onderhoude wat gevoer is met ouers wat die program bygewoon het, het aangedui dat die program suksesvol was en dat die doelstellings bereik is. Die ouers het aangedui dat hulle optrede in drie belangrike areas wat skoolgereedheid bevorder, verbeter het, naamlik die ouer-kind-verhouding, ouer-kind-interaksie en die skepping van 'n leeromgewing tuis. Die navorsing het bewys dat ouervaardighede wat skoolgereedheid bevorder, ontwikkel en verbeter kan word deur die toepassing van 'n oerleidingprogram.

Sleutelwoorde: skoolgereedheid, vroeë kinderontwikkeling, sosiale ontwikkeling, emosionele ontwikkeling, ouers, oerleidingprogramme, sosio-ekonomiese probleme, armoede.

## PREFACE

During the literature study the researcher discovered that the study field of child development and parenting was so vast, that the researcher found it impossible to pursue all relevant resources. The researcher consequently focused on resources that were referred to by other researchers or authoritative academic resources.

The researcher found herself immersed in psychology theory that the researcher had to familiarize herself with. Given the extent of literature in the field of early childhood development, the researcher had to limit the amount of theory in the literature study, to theory that is focused on school readiness and parenting and not a comprehensive study of all the aspects of child development. The researcher also studied resources of other disciplines and was surprised by the close connection between disciplines, for example pediatric articles on the risks of child abuse, or the problems that health practitioners have, gaining the co-operation of parents living with socio-economic challenges. This brought to the researcher's attention the value of different disciplines cooperating with each other and complementing each other.

One constant challenge that the researcher had to contend with, was to use recent references that were original sources. Time and again the researcher followed up a reference that an author had used, only to find that that source was also not the original source, but had also made use of an even earlier reference. When the same names of researchers came up again and again, the researcher used the original source although the date was sometimes not recent. In this regard the researcher has for instance Shonkoff and Philips (2000), the authors of 'Neurons to Neighborhoods' and Mouton's research guide (2001) in mind. Although the copyright date of Mouton's book is 2001, the book is re-published yearly as can be seen by the reference to impression (i.e. 16<sup>th</sup> impression) on the cover page.

Nearing the end of this study, the researcher became aware of new editions of resources that she had used. Examples of these literature sources are Shaffer and Kipp (2010, 2014) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016). Efforts were made to locate these newer editions, but it was not always successful. The researcher enquired from university libraries, but these resources had not been obtained. The researcher endeavoured to access these resources through the internet, but in all the cases only a few pages were displayed, not enough to update all the references in the researcher's text. In some instances where references from the old and the new editions were used, both references were included in the reference list.

In the search for literature on certain topics of the programme, such as tips to parents on various issues, humour or a healthy lifestyle, the researcher could not always access academic resources on the topics and had to resort to popular websites, newsletters from organisations and churches

to parents and information pamphlets. The researcher used her own experience and knowledge base to judge whether the information in these resources were reliable and authoritative.

This research report contains some of the resources used for the programme and some examples are provided in the annexures, but it was impossible to include all the evidence. A few photographs were taken, but the researcher refrained from taking too many, especially during the first phase of the research, when she was still building a relationship of trust with the participants. The researcher also did not want to intrude when the parents were involved in activities with their children. In many activities the researcher encouraged the parents to go with their children to a quiet corner of the venue and to imagine that they and their child were in a bubble. This was done to encourage the development of intimacy between parent and child. Many photographs could not be used, in order to protect the identity of the participants.

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROBLEM FORMULATION, OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

#### 1.1 ORIENTATION AND PROBLEM FORMULATION

**“Every child has the right to the best possible start in life.”**

(Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services)

Every phase of human development is important, but in the past decades early childhood has emerged in literature as a vitally important developmental phase that impacts significantly on a person's well-being and functioning in all the successive developmental phases (Lake, 2007:1277; McClelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000:307-308; Skweyiya, 2006:1). Section 91 of the South African Children's Act (2005), defines early childhood development as the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of children from birth until school-going age. A healthy pregnancy, birth and early childhood lay the foundation for lifelong prosperity, successful functioning and positive relationships with others (Richter, 2013:7; Lake, 2007:1277). According to the Department of Education's White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (2001) the term “early childhood” includes all children from birth to at least 9 years of age. According to the 2011 Census (StatsSA) there are 5.6 million children between the ages of 0-4 years and 4.8 million children between the ages of 5–9 years in South Africa. The sheer numbers of children in this age group, as well as the importance of this developmental phase as foundation for further development, compel policy and legislation as well as research to be directed at early childhood development.

One of the most important developmental tasks of early childhood is for children to achieve school readiness and to integrate them successfully into the formal school system. According to Van Zyl (2011:35) school readiness means that a child needs to be ready in totality for the formal education system. This includes physical, cognitive, social and normative development, as well as a range of perceptual and conceptual abilities. Researchers generally agree that school readiness is a multidimensional concept, which includes physical development, social/emotional development, approaches to learning, language development and cognitive development (UNICEF, 2012: 9-10; Lau, Li & Rau, 2011:97). The Western Cape Department of Education (2012) provides a check list of skills for school readiness that children should adhere to. These include skills such as to be able to sit and listen in class, acceptance of adult authority, completing simple tasks, and the ability to converse confidently in the mother tongue. (The comprehensive list is provided in Chapter 2). It is important to note that school readiness does not only depend on these domains as separate entities, but on the interrelationship between the different domains

(UNICEF, 2012:9). This viewpoint is confirmed by Ngwaru (2012:27) who states that children's early emotional and social development impact directly on their early literacy development as well as their sustained school attendance and progress.

There is a growing awareness of the impact that school readiness has on all aspects of children's later development and their functioning in all walks of life. Van Zyl (2011:40) found that school readiness has a highly significant influence on learners' academic success in Grade 1 as well as later in Grade 7. McClelland, *et al.*, (2000:307-308) believe that skills acquired before school-going age, leading to school readiness, contribute greatly to positive academic outcomes. In the long run, positive academic outcomes can lead to opportunities for higher education and better employment prospects. Ngwaru (2012:27) states that school readiness impacts on children's academic progress and sustained school attendance, thus preventing early drop-out from school. Without adequate schooling children face a bleak future.

School readiness is not only viewed as an important stepping stone in ensuring good educational outcomes for individual learners, but it also has implications on a much wider scale. On a macro level, preparing children to excel academically is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing poverty and to stimulate the economic growth and prosperity of a nation (UNICEF, 2012:3; Young & Richardson, 2007:9-10). UNICEF's policy document on school readiness (2012:4) states that '...school readiness has been garnering attention as a strategy for economic development. Approaches to economic growth and development consider human capital as a key conduit for sustained and viable development, the inception of which begins in the early years.'

Since education is the key to a successful life, it is imperative that all children should enjoy an equal opportunity to obtain an education and therefore that stumbling blocks to this ideal should be eliminated. The right of every South African child to receive basic as well as further education provided by the state, is enshrined in the Bill of Rights (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act no. 108 of 1996 SS. 29–32). The problem is that many children enter the South Africa school system but they are unable to adhere to the demands of the formal school system. The Department of Education's White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (2001:5) states that approximately 40% of children in South Africa grow up in conditions of extreme poverty and neglect, leading to an increased risk of stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, failing grades and eventually school dropout. It is widely acknowledged that young children under the age of 9 years are a particularly vulnerable section of our community. The early years is a period of great potential for human development (Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University, In Brief, 2011; The National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in SA, 2005) during which healthy brain development in children lays the foundation for later development. The effect of growing up in deprived or traumatic circumstances could have a long-lasting effect on children.

Policy statements accentuating the vital importance of a positive early childhood development, include the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa (2005), Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (DSD:2006), the Department of Education's White Paper on Early Childhood Development (2001), as well as the White Paper on Families in SA (DSD, 2013). These documents call for a commitment to improve service delivery to this age group.

Clearly then, successful early childhood development, leading to school readiness, potentially lays the foundation for good education and developmental outcomes. South African legislation and policies make provision for extensive service delivery towards early childhood development. Three pieces of legislation, namely the Children's Act (2005), White Paper 5 of the Department of Education (2001:3) as well as the White Paper on Families in South Africa (DSD, 2013:37-39), have direct implications for this study:

- Sections 143 & 144 of the Children's Act (2005) and the White Paper on Families (2013:37-39) make extensive provision for the delivery of prevention and early intervention services to parents to ensure a safe and healthy home environment for children and for responsible parenting. This provides a mandate for social service professionals to render services to the parents of children in need;
- White Paper 5 of the Department of Education (2001:3) makes provision for the establishment of a national accredited Reception Year Programme (Grade R) for all children five years of age to prepare them for entering Grade 1. This Paper states that the effects of early deprivation can be reversed by timely and appropriate interventions. In order to address early learning opportunities of all young children, but especially those growing up in poverty, the Grade R year provides indispensable preparation for the successful integration of young children into the formal school system. The provision of a Grade R system in schools, creates the ideal structure for service delivery to Grade R learners and their parents.

Ideally, early childhood development including school readiness should facilitate pathways for children to flourish, as outlined by Keyes (2013:4). The focus of this study will be on the development of a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in two resource poor communities. The underlying premise is that parents have much to offer in terms of the development of skills that could contribute to school readiness, which is an important outcome of early childhood development. Most of the required skills on the school readiness list of the WCED (2012) have a direct link with the quality of parenting that children receive, such as feeling secure enough to accept the absence of the parent without becoming upset, being able to sit and listen in class, accept adult authority, complete simple tasks

independently, and the ability to converse confidently in the mother tongue. Participants in this research will be the parents of Grade R learners as well as the Grade R learners themselves, in two resource poor communities in the Western Cape. The rationale for including the learners is that the researcher would like to engage both parents and learners in activities and games linked to the skills that the researcher aims to convey to the parents, to reinforce in a practical and concrete way the skills and knowledge that were shared with the parents. A comprehensive literature search pointed to a gap in literature regarding direct involvement of parents and children in a parenting skills programme aimed at school readiness.

To plan an intervention programme for Grade R learners and their parents, it is necessary to investigate all the possible factors that influence children's school readiness as well as the factors that impact directly and indirectly on the quality of parenting that children receive. A child's development is shaped by a complex variety of influences that emerge from multiple environments. In this regard, Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006:795) emphasise the role of context in child development. According to these authors, development is the product of proximal processes consisting of constant and ongoing reciprocal interactions between an individual, and people and things in his immediate environment, and that is also influenced by historical and life events. Bronfenbrenner (1979:3) refers to the ecological environment of a person as a set of structures of which the one fits into the next like a set of Russian dolls. In the innermost structure is the developing person (or Grade R learner, for the purposes of this study). As Visser (2012:25) points out, reality is complex with systems forming networks of interrelated relationships. Although the young child is mostly exposed to influences within the micro-environment of the family, the child and family do not live in a vacuum. The influence of factors in the macro- and meso environment is sometimes indirect in that it impacts on the quality of parenting that the children receive although they may never have direct contact with these factors (Alice-Brown, 2013:17; Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3). In this regard Rosa and Tudge (2013:244) indicate that researchers should study the settings where human development takes place as well as the relations in such settings. Furthermore, the influence of history both personal and family, and on a macro level such as socio-political aspects, should be studied when working with developing individuals. According to UNICEF's policy document on school readiness (2012:6), school readiness is the product of the interaction between the child and a variety of environmental and cultural experiences that maximize the developmental outcomes for children. Preschool children are more vulnerable than older children to the effect of poverty, that negatively impacts on their academic achievement, behaviour and health (Leseman & Slot, 2014:315). This then leads to the next discussion of influences on a meso- and macro level as well as the historical influences that could influence early childhood development and school readiness in South Africa, because they could have a very detrimental impact on the quality of parenting that children receive (Eamon, 2001:262; Puckering, 2004:38; Yoshikawa, Aber & Beardslee, 2012:273).

Twenty years after the oppressive regime of apartheid was replaced by democracy, the development of most of the young children in South Africa is still at a disadvantage as a result of a range of social and economic inequalities (Atmore, 2013:152; Fleisch 2008:76). Fleisch (2008:76) found that factors such as poor health and nutrition as well as poverty impacted negatively on children's school readiness, school attendance and their academic achievement later in life. This viewpoint is confirmed by Lake (2011:1277) who speaks from a global perspective, saying that poor nutrition and health as well as a lack of stimulation during early childhood, jeopardize the possibility that children will reach their full potential and this increases the possibility that poor health and poverty will be carried over to adulthood.

Still on a macro level, it is important to take note of the South African school system, as this should be an enabling environment to further the development and education of children. Despite the Department of Basic Education's commitment (2010) to improved service delivery, there is a growing chorus of voices declaring that the education system is in a crisis. Possible contributing factors to the crisis in education on a macro and meso level are an inadequate Schools' Act, changes in the curriculum every few years, and low levels of commitment to educator training (Prew, 2009). Other contributing factors include huge inequalities and poor infrastructure in schools in disadvantaged communities (Fleisch, 2008:48, Jansen, 2013), poorly trained and incompetent educators (Prew, 2009, Jansen, 2012), educator absenteeism, vacant educator posts and poor governance of schools (Mohlala, 2010:2).

To blame poor academic performance exclusively on factors within the education system is over simplification of the problem. Deficiencies in the school system make it imperative that, on micro level, the quality of parenting that young children receive, should enhance school readiness in preparation for positive cognitive and behavioural outcomes. The fact that parents influence their children's academic performance is well documented by child development experts and researchers (Cowan & Cowan, 2012:75; Morrison & Cooney, 2012:144-156; Wade, 2004:199). According to Machet and Pretorius (2004:39) and Morrison and Cooney (2012:156) research points to parenting as a key element in the development of literacy skills and academic success in young children. Other parenting practices that make a vital contribution to children's school readiness are a positive parent-child relationship, parental warmth and involvement in the child's development (Cowan and Cowan, 2012:83; Li, Chan, Mak & Lam, 2013, n.p.; Morrison and Cooney, 2012:144-156; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird & Kupzyk, 2010:128), positive discipline (Wade, 2004:202) and parents' cognitive stimulation of their children, as well as the quality of literacy environment that they create for their children (McClelland, *et al.*, 2000:307). The White Paper on Families in SA (2013:5) cites Hardon (1998:1), who states that the family is indispensable for education and it is the most important source of education for children. The

document also refers to Ferhman, *et al.*, (1987) and Desforges and Abouchaar (2003) who contend that there is a positive influence on academic performance when parents or caregivers are involved in the children's education in meaningful ways. These children are more likely to achieve higher grades, have better school attendance, have higher levels of motivation and they are less likely to present with disciplinary problems. This view of the influence of parental involvement in children's education, links with the viewpoint of the British Department for Education (2012) that the role of parents during a child's earliest years, is the single biggest influence on their development.

The researcher has been working as a School Social Worker for the Department of Education for the past five years. The researcher is responsible for dealing with all the social problems that learners experience in 36 schools in various communities. The researcher's interest in the proposed research topic originates from work in these schools and specifically the researcher's observations regarding the influence of the quality of parenting that learners receive at home regarding all areas of their functioning and development. An important part of her formal job description is to work with parents and to provide parenting skills training. Training parents in parenting skills is traditionally one of the key responsibilities of social workers including school social workers. It is envisaged that the parenting skills programme that will be developed for this research, will address a unique gap, namely combining social work skills in the context of parenting with school readiness. The premise is that parents must be equipped to create an environment at home conducive to learning and to the development of their children. This entails more than just cognitive development. From a social work perspective there will be a strong focus on social and emotional school readiness. Furthermore, the researcher works in schools every day and it is clear that teachers and school psychologists usually do not have the time or the capacity to address all the areas of parenting related to school readiness.

The Department of Education invests much energy and manpower into supporting Grade 12 learners with extra classes in the afternoon as well as Saturday tutoring, plus support groups for vulnerable learners. The problem that the researcher has witnessed is that, by Grade 12, learners have fallen so far behind in their studies, that the intervention measures applied in their final year, do little to ameliorate their academic backlog. This led the researcher to question whether this poor academic outcome could have been averted if interventions had been put in place during the years of early childhood development, starting with school readiness. It is an important part of the problem statement that innovative ways must be found to enhance children's capacity to complete school. According to Van der Merwe (2014:3) nationally, only 50% of learners who were in Grade 2 in 2003, completed matric in 2013. The highest drop-out number was in secondary school. The number of learners dropping out between Grade 2 and Grade 12 increased significantly over the past three years: 465 391 Grade 2 learners in 2002 were lost to the school system by 2011, 496

000 of the 2003 group Grade 2's were lost by 2012 and more than 560 000 of the 2003 Grade 2 class dropped out by 2013 (Van der Merwe, 2014:3). This high number of school drop-outs is of great concern and it is the researcher's opinion that interventions should start early enough to enable learners to enter the school system ready and able to adhere to the demands of the classroom, with the involvement of their parents.

In an intensive research for the University of the Western Cape that was done in underperforming schools in the Western Cape by Louw, Bayat and Eigelaar-Meets (2011), the following findings that raise concern are included in Report 4:

- There are many learners who fail in their first and second years at school, which indicates that they are not ready for the formal school system when they enter Grade 1 (Louw, Bayat & Eigelaar-Meets, 2011:17);
- Any intervention programme in schools needs to be supported at home and parental involvement needs to improve (Louw, Bayat & Eigelaar-Meets, 2011:17);
- Socio-economic factors play an important role in learners' academic achievement. Socio-economic challenges leading to concerns about health, safety, transport and poverty have a detrimental effect on both teaching and learning in the classroom (Louw, Bayat & Eigelaar-Meets, 2011:15).

The researcher's personal experience as a School Social Worker with specific reference to the resource poor communities where the researcher works, leads to the following observations:

*Unstable family structure:* Many learners come from homes where there is no stable family structure, where siblings have different fathers, where mothers' partners come and go, or where children are raised by single parents as the other parent are often physically or emotionally absent. Many children are cared for by primary caregivers who are not the biological parents, such as grandparents.

*Socio-economic problems:* Family life is often plagued by unemployment and poverty, family violence and child abuse, as well as high levels of stress, anger and frustration. Substance abuse amongst parents and children is spreading, impacting negatively on the quality of parenting and resulting in children choosing not to spend time at home. These children take refuge in their friends' company and they spend an inordinate amount of time on the streets.

*Poor discipline and family routine:* Due to an absence of structure and family routine, children from a young age are allowed to go to bed late, they wander in the streets past supper time and families do not share mealtimes together. Children are often absent from school because the whole family overslept and they do not want to be punished for coming late. Discipline is not applied consistently and it mainly consists of punitive measures such as swearing and sometimes severe

beatings. Parents themselves often do not adhere to healthy norms and values of society and resort to problem behaviours such as family violence or substance abuse.

*Community influences:* High levels of unemployment, substance abuse and substance peddling, inappropriate sexual behaviour, gangsterism and violence are rife in these communities, subjecting children to traumatic experiences such as witnessing violent incidents including shootings or stabbings. Loss of loved ones or neighbours through violence or incarceration is also common.

*Resistance to change:* One problem that the researcher has encountered as a social worker many times, is the indifference of many parents to any programmes offered by the school, in particular those parents who need such a programme most. It is usually the caring and competent parents who attend functions and workshops, but the parents who are really in need of intervention, do not attend. According to the principal of a school in one of the target communities, it is often those parents who are unemployed and sitting at home who do not attend meetings and functions at school. Motivating those parents who really need their parenting skills to improve, will be one of the challenges that the researcher will have to contend with, since no other measures can replace parents in developing school readiness. Resistance to Social Work intervention is a common-place occurrence in Social Work for various reasons, but there are strategies to reduce resistance and to motivate parents to participate as outlined by Forrester, Westlake and Glynn (2012:125-126).

According to research findings in literature, the researcher's observations as described above, pose a serious risk to children's social, emotional and academic development and impact negatively on school readiness. Over a period of time several authors have described the devastating cumulative effect of poverty and the problems associated with poverty regarding the development of children (Beatty, 2013:71; Eamon, 2001:257; Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark & Howes, 2010: 433; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010: 126;). Problems mentioned are poor or inconsistent parenting (Puckering (2004:41, Eamon, 2001:258), harsh, violent or inconsistent discipline and lack of supervision (Puckering, 2004:41; Wessels & Ward, 2013:21), lack of family routine (Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010:126) and poor nutrition and health care (Beatty, 2013:71; Eamon, 2001:259; Mistry, *et al.*, 2010: 433; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010: 126). Furrer and Skinner (2003:148-162) found that children with a weak sense of belonging to parents, enter the school unprepared or unwilling to bond with educators and peers and to comply with the demands of the classroom. Children from homes with marital tension and unresolved conflict amongst parents, which cause parents to be less warm, more harsh and structuring and less encouraging of their children's autonomy, score significantly lower at school than other children (Cowan & Cowan, 2012:84).

Exposure to deprivation or highly stressful family situations early in life, negatively affects a child's brain development and such children enter school with a significant disadvantage compared to other children, which negatively influences their learning ability and behaviour (Beatty, 2013:72; Duncan & Murnane, 2011:9). Growing up in an impoverished community with accompanying violence, unemployment, lack of community resources and where children feel unsafe to move around, affect children's development negatively (Beatty, 2013:71; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010:126). Added to these factors is the resistance of parents for interventions by welfare organisations. There are many possible reasons for this, including these parents' ignorance, their indifference to the needs of their children, feeling intimidated by services offered and the fear of being belittled and criticized (Puckering, 2004:39,51).

Despite the above-mentioned problems, the ideal still exists for all children to complete their early developmental tasks successfully and to thrive in a home and school environment that is conducive to academic progress. It is imperative that any measures to improve children's school readiness should be implemented, including parenting skills development. In resource poor communities the quality of parenting practices is often negatively impacted and resources are inaccessible or depleted (Kotchick & Forehand 2002:7; Puckering, 2004:4). Parental involvement in the preparation of children to enter the formal school system and to assist both parents and children to adjust to the new demands, is crucial to the success of the transition (Li, *et al.*, 2013:3). The researcher searched the literature for parenting programmes that might meet the needs of the study. There are many parenting programmes described in literature (Li, *et al.*, 2013:), but the researcher could not find a programme that included both parents and children, that was focused on school readiness and that would be practical to implement in the specific circumstances in which the researcher works. Some parenting programmes focus on school readiness, but then only on one aspect, such as the numeracy or literacy development of the child (Whitsel & Lapham, 2013:1-12; Machet & Pretorius, 2004: 39-46), perceptual skills (Pitt, Luger, Bullen & Phillips, 2013:1-14) or on the social-emotional readiness of the child (Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010:125-156). Other programmes include children of all ages (Lau, Fung, Ho & Liu, 2011: 413-426), include only the parents (Lau, Li & Rau, 2011:95-133; Marais, Ingle, Skinner & Sigenu, 2012:85-120), involve home instruction (Johnson, Martinez-Cantu, Jacobsen & Weir, 2012:713-727; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010:125-156), are presented by a multi-disciplinary team (Pitt, *et al.*, 2013:1-14) or involve giving out learning apparatus and books (Johnson, *et al.*, 2012: 713-727). The researcher will use elements of other parenting programmes that the researcher can access to develop a new programme suitable for the specific circumstances in the target communities and target schools.

Social workers in schools as well as other social workers generally have limited time and resources to present parenting programmes and they do not always have the assistance of colleagues, teachers or members of other disciplines who are also working under pressure. They

also do not have funding or access to expensive apparatus or resources that are used in other parenting programmes described in literature. The researcher aims to develop a programme that could be presented in schools and outside of schools by social workers during their work, as well as to groups of parents and their Grade R children, with the specific aim to develop a range of school readiness skills in such a way that the parents will be able to continue the activities at home.

In summary, the problem as described above indicates that factors from macro to micro level such as poverty, the crisis in the education system and parenting practices impact on school readiness, causing long term ramifications for academic progress and development in general. From the researcher's own work experiences as well as research findings in literature, it seems as if parenting practices, whether positive or negative, impact significantly on children's school readiness. On the other hand, literature indicates that parenting programmes in resource poor communities, yield positive results with a significant improvement in various areas of parenting (Fayyad, Farah, Cassir, Salamoun & Karan, 2010:633; Benzies, Mychasiuk, Kurilova, Tough, Edwards & Donnelly, 2014:211). The researcher could not find information on parenting skills programmes in resource poor communities that focused on school readiness, and no literature on inclusion of children in such programmes to enable parents to apply their skills directly to their children. This research aimed to address this gap. In light of the above information, the following research questions were formulated:

### **1.1.1 Main research question**

What would the components be of a parenting skills programme that is aimed at enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners in resource poor communities?

### **1.1.2 Subsidiary questions**

Specific research questions were also part of the various phases of this research:

What is the role of parenting in the school readiness of Grade R learners as revealed by a literature review?

What are the problems and strengths with regards to parenting practices and school readiness in resource poor communities as identified by educators, social workers and parents in the target communities?

What is the effect/influence of the parenting skills program that was developed for the school readiness of Grade R learners in two resource poor communities?

This research was conducted within a social constructivist framework, where findings were not exact. This was a basic premise of this study. The researcher acknowledges that there could have been many other mediating variables influencing the children's school readiness. The researcher acknowledges the value of complexity theory where 'nonlinear, context-, and contingency-specific interactions among emerging entities are emphasized' (Rogers, *et al.*, 2013:30). It is also acknowledged that there is no real truth which is intensified by the many mediating variables in children's lives, also while they were research participants. Rogers, *et al.* (2013:31) strongly emphasize the importance of complexity thinking when trying to comprehend and deal with current social-ecological realities. According to these authors this implied a meeting of intellectual understanding with lived realities of participants.

## **1.2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

### **1.2.1 Aim**

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016:73) the aim of a study is informed by the research question and it needs to provide the rationale for the study and describe the issues that need to be clarified.

The aim of this study was to use intervention research to develop a parenting skills programme, aimed at enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners in resource poor communities.

### **1.2.2 Objectives**

The objectives describing the systematic steps that were necessary to achieve the above aim were the following:

- To conduct a literature study to develop a conceptual framework on the construct school readiness and to examine the role of parenting in the development of school readiness (Chapter 2: *The role of parenting in the development of school readiness in Grade R learners: a conceptual framework*).
- To ascertain the strengths and problems of parenting practices and school readiness in two resource poor communities by conducting focus groups with educators, professionals and parents of Grade R learners in these communities, with the focus on the problems (Chapter 3: *Exploring the constructs of parenting practices and school readiness in resource poor communities*).
- To design a prototype parenting skills programme based on the data collected above. (Chapters 4: *Designing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners*).
- To present the parenting skills programme in two schools in resource poor communities and to assess the effect of the programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners by using qualitative data. (Chapters 5 & 6: *Implementing a parenting skills programme to*

*enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners/What is the effect of a parenting skills programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners?)*

### **1.3 CENTRAL THEORETICAL STATEMENT**

If parents in resource poor communities are involved in parenting skills programmes where they engage with their children, they may be better equipped to provide a solid home environment with structure and adequate parenting to enhance their children's school readiness. If children can be supported by parents to master early childhood developmental tasks related to school readiness, such as confidence, curiosity, self-control, connectedness, ability to communicate and willingness to cooperate, it might contribute to better educational outcomes and more learners completing Grade 12.

### **1.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Methodological assumptions of a qualitative study include the process and language of the study. Inductive logic was applied, in other words the researcher worked with particulars before generalising, and, because the topic was studied in its natural context, a detailed description of the context is given. (Creswell, 2013:21).

#### **1.4.1 Research approach**

The nature of this study was qualitative. Qualitative research has as its goal the exploration, description and clarification of social phenomena (Engelbrecht, 2016:110). Instead of producing exact measurements as in quantitative research, the qualitative researcher seeks the rich descriptive data provided by participants from the subjective viewpoints, values and experiences through which they have construed their reality (Engelbrecht, 2016:110; Nieuwenhuis & Smit, 2012:125). Qualitative data can be collected through interviews, observation, reflective journals, pilot studies and documentation (Engelbrecht, 2016:110-117).

Any research needs to be underpinned by a philosophical paradigm, which represents a researcher's viewpoint of the world and the way that the researcher interacts with and enters into a relationship with the happenings in the world (Lombard, 2016:8, Nieuwenhuis, 2016:52). The philosophical stance that a researcher takes, is informed by the ontological question, in other words, what the nature of reality is, and by epistemology, which indicates the way in which the researcher studies reality (Chilisa & Kavulich, 2012:51; Lombard, 2016:9). For the purposes of this study the researcher followed a constructivist paradigm. Social constructivism takes into account the social origin of meaning and the social character attached to it, as well as the social context

with its cultural and historical influences in which the research takes place, and the impact that it has on the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013:2; Chilisa & Kavulich, 2012:56; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:9; Teater, 2014:74). A constructivist viewpoint assumes that individuals seek to understand their world by attaching subjective meaning to objects and things. These are formed through interaction with others and through historical and cultural influences operating in their environment. The constructivist researcher strives to make sense of the subjective meanings that participants attach to their lives and situations and the interdependent interactions in social contexts (Creswell, 2013:24-25; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:9; Teater, 2014:74). The researcher needed to accept that participants were going to enter into the research situation with the unique meanings that they attached to parenting, relationships, values, and the significance of school as well as other aspects of their world.

The assumptions that underpinned this study were therefore the following:

- People are living, thinking humans who seek to understand their world by attaching unique meaning to objects in their world.
- The researcher had to keep in mind the multiple realities subjectively constructed by individuals (Chilisa & Kawulich, 2012:51; Creswell, 2013:24; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:60).
- The research would take place in the natural setting of schools in the target communities where participants lived, worked and attended school (Creswell 2013:44; Williams, Unrau & Grinnell, 2005:79).
- The researcher would be the primary research instrument to collect and analyse data. The researcher would be present in the research situation and therefore had to be able to respond immediately and adapt to situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:16; Williams, *et al.*, 2005:81).
- To present a programme that the participants understand and attach value to, the researcher needed to discover the constructs participants had formed of parenting and school readiness (Creswell, 2013:25).
- Verbal as well as non-verbal communication with participants would be used to gather data, clarify matters, check with participants for accuracy of interpretation and explore responses that are unclear (Creswell 2013:166; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:16; Williams, *et al.*, 2005:81).

Qualitative interviews with focus groups and parents would give the researcher access to, and understanding of the interplay of mediating variables in the systems of each family, which might have influenced school based assessments of school readiness.

#### **1.4.2 Research design**

The research design is the strategy for the research (Creswell, 2013:49; Thomas, 2009:70). It sets out all the decisions that need to be made as well as justification for those decisions (Blaikie,

2010:13). According to Bertram and Christiansen (2014:40) the research design clarifies the type of study that will be undertaken and it is determined or guided by the research question and purpose. Intervention research was the design for this study, with the various phases of intervention research, as is outlined later. The research was applied, as it entailed knowledge development to enhance practice by developing tools for the helping professions (Fox & Bayat, 2007:10; Jansen, 2016:9). Bless, Higson-Smith and Sithole (2013:389) describe the primary aim of applied social research as 'finding solutions to specific concerns or problems facing particular groups of people by applying models or theories developed through basic social research'. This links with the opinion of Mishna, Muskat and Cook (2012:135) that intervention research is important for Social Work, because it entails the scientific development of new practice approaches and it provides evidence with regards to the effectiveness of interventions. Horton and Hawkins (2010:377) express a similar view and emphasize that more practice based research should be undertaken to bridge the existing gap between practice and research. De Vos and Strydom (2011:450) identify a crucial element that distinguishes intervention research from other types of evaluation research as the innovative nature of the former. In intervention research a new programme or intervention is designed and developed and then evaluated and researchers do not rely on a programme that was developed by someone else.

A detailed description of the research process that was followed, is as follows:

The proposed research design was the Design and Development (D&D) model of intervention research as pioneered by Rothman and Thomas (1994:31-33) and is still used as a framework for research (Gilgun & Sands, 2012:350; De Vos & Strydom, 2011:480; Fraser & Galinsky, 2010:468). Fraser and Galinsky (2010:5) describe intervention research as 'purposively implemented change strategies'. Gilgun (2012:1) and Gilgun and Sands (2012:349) refer to intervention research as developmental intervention research due to the continuous testing and modification of social service programmes to comply with the requirements of research situations and new populations and contexts. Gilgun (2012:1) regards intervention research as the bridge between academic research and practice. Although contemporary researchers sometimes make use of a five-point model (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010:468), the D&D model originally described by Rothman and Thomas, (1994:31-33) was followed in this study and consisted of the following six phases:

1. Problem analysis and project planning
2. Information gathering and synthesis
3. Design of the intervention
4. Early development and pilot testing
5. Evaluation and advanced development
6. Dissemination.

The six phases of the D&D model of intervention research were implemented in this study in the following way:

#### 1.4.2.1 Phase 1: Problem analysis and project planning

##### **Phase 1: Problem analysis and project planning**

Step 1: Obtained ethical clearance from NWU

Step 2: Obtained permission for research from Western Cape Education Department, school principals and governing bodies of participating schools

The researcher identified the problem that there is a lack of school readiness amongst South African children entering the formal school system, and the fact that these children mostly do not catch up with their peers, leading to poor academic progress and poor outcomes for themselves and for society. This is especially true for children in communities challenged by socio-economic hardship. To address this problem, the researcher proposed to develop a parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities. During this phase the researcher made use of literature related to the identified problem as well as the researcher's own knowledge, since the researcher worked in the target communities and dealt with the challenges related to the identified problem on a daily basis.

**Step 1:** The researcher submitted the protocol to the Health Research Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences of NWU, to obtain ethical clearance to continue with the research.

**Step 2:** The researcher applied to the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) for formal permission to conduct research in schools, which was granted until October 2016. The researcher obtained permission from the principals and governing bodies of the three target schools and provided them with the letter of permission from the WCED head office.

#### 1.4.2.2 Phase 2: Information gathering and synthesis

Phase 2 provided answers to two research questions:

- What is the role of parenting in the school readiness of Grade R learners as revealed by a literature study? (Literature study)
- What are the problems and strengths with regards to parenting practices and school readiness in the two target communities as identified by teachers, social workers and parents? (Focus group discussions)

## Phase 2: Information gathering and synthesis

Existing information was obtained through the literature study and focus groups. The process comprised of the following:

Step 3: Literature study

Step 4: Focus group discussions

### Step 3: Literature study

#### Chapter 2: The role of parents in the school readiness of Grade R learners

<p><b>Research question 1:</b></p> <p>What is the role of parenting in the school readiness of Grade R learners as revealed by a literature study?</p>	Participants: None
	Research approach: Literature study
	Method of data collection: Study of relevant literature
	Data analysis: None
	Ethics: Literature was portrayed in an exact and scientific manner and correct referencing was ensured
	Trustworthiness: An audit trail of literature conducted, with in text referencing and a reference list was provided

### Step 4: Focus group discussions

#### Chapter 3: Exploring the constructs of school readiness and parenting in resource poor communities

<p><b>Question 2:</b></p> <p>What are the problems and strengths with regards to parenting practices and school readiness in resource poor communities as identified by educators, social workers and parents in the two target communities?</p>	Participants:
	Educators and social workers working in the communities as well as parents of Grade 1 learners (Participant group 1)
	Sampling: Purposive sampling
	Research approach and design: Intervention research with a qualitative approach (Galinsky, 2010:468; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:72)
	Method of data collection:
	Focus groups (Bless, <i>et al.</i> , 2013:200; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:95; Somekh & Lewin, 2005:61)
Personal reflections: The researcher journalled her reflections of her own experience and personal observations	
Audio recording of the focus group discussions	
Data analysis: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013)	

Ethics: Informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, no harm to participants, no conflict of interest
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These two processes were implemented in the following way:

### *Step 3: Literature study*

The major function of a literature study is to link the proposed research to the existing body of literature and form a theoretical framework for the research. Literature provides the researcher with a view of what other research results revealed and what might be expected (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:49). A literature study on the role of parents in the development of school readiness was done during this phase and the results are documented in Chapter 2.

The researcher made use of several data bases including the libraries of NWU, the University of Stellenbosch and the Western Cape Education Department, as well as Ebscohost and Google Scholar. The researcher conducted interdisciplinary searches as recommended by Bless, *et al.* (2013:49) and used only full-text publications, as advised by Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2012:36-37). Only recent publications were used, unless older publications contained theories and research that were still regarded as authoritative. In contrast to literature studies in quantitative research, the literature study formed a continuous procedure throughout the research process (Blaikie, 2010:17-18; Williams, Unrau & Grinnell, 2005:78). The literature study itself was not a goal, but a step in the process to identify the functional elements or components of the parenting programme that the researcher planned to develop (Rothman & Thomas, 1994:31-33; De Vos & Strydom, 2011:480).

### *Step 4: Gaining input from professionals and community members*

Gaining input from the parents and professionals in the target communities was the second step in utilizing existing information. The results are described in Chapter 3. According to Gilgun and Sands (2012:350-351) the design and development of an intervention programme needs to be constructed on an exhaustive understanding that it is a challenging situation that aims to generate change. The challenges in the target communities needed to be described as meticulously as possible, and included the views and experiences of the service providers and the people who worked and lived there. The strengths as well as the multiple influences and risk factors impacting on the people's lives needed to be considered. Although the focus group discussions included questions with regards to the strengths in the target communities, the focus was on the problems, because the aim of the proposed parenting programme was to address these problems.

### *Sampling and data collection*

During this phase of the research, data were collected through three focus group discussions. The main purpose of a focus group is to discuss a specific topic in a gathering of individuals who are

homogenous in a certain area (Hays & Singh, 2012:252; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:95). According to Braun and Clarke (2013:108), Hays and Singh (2012:252) and Nieuwenhuis (2016:95) focus groups differ from interviews in that they stimulate interaction amongst participants and they serve as a catalyst for disclosure and expanding on or challenging different viewpoints, instead of simply generating information. The focus group discussions were captured on audio recorder, and to allow for maximum accuracy, they were transcribed before a thematic analysis was done. According to Braun and Clarke (2013:178) thematic analysis is a way to analyse and organise data to identify meaningful patterned responses or themes with regards to the research question. To identify themes, the data had to be coded. Bless, *et al.* (2013:342, 392), Mukherji and Albon (2015:278), Nieuwenhuis (2016:116) and Walliman (2011:133) describe the coding process to analyse and divide data into more compact and meaningful units of analysis. After reading and rereading the transcriptions, the data were coded to identify repetitive patterns across the data, to compare the different views expressed and to capture the richness of the information divulged.

#### 1.4.2.3 Phase 3: Design and development of the intervention

<p><b>Phase 3: Design of the intervention</b></p> <p>Step 5: Design and development of the prototype</p>	
<p><b>Step 5: Determine the components of a parenting programme</b></p> <p><b>Chapter 4: Design and development of the parenting programme</b></p>	
<p><b>Main research question:</b> What would the components be of a parenting skills programme that is aimed at enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners in resource poor communities?</p>	Participants: None
	Sampling: None
	Research approach: Qualitative
	Method of data collection: No new data were collected, but the following data were analysed to determine the components of the prototype: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Data gathered during phase 1</li> <li>• Ongoing literature study</li> </ul>
	Data analysis: The literature study was compared to the data collected through the focus groups and the components were determined according to the deficits in parenting in the target communities.

	Ethics: Scientific principles of literature study and reporting were followed.
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The design and development phase was focused on providing an answer to the research question:

**What are the components of a parenting programme that would enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities?**

Gilgun and Sands (2012:351) recommend that the design and development of an intervention programme to be based on the in-depth knowledge and understanding of the challenges, risks and strengths of the identified problem area. To identify the components of the proposed parenting programme, the researcher mainly relied on the data collected during the previous phase and then coded it in the following way as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2013:206): The focus group discussions were captured on audio recorder and transcribed. The researcher read and re-read the transcriptions to become familiar with the content. The data were then organised into themes, and codes were allocated to each theme for easier identification.

*1.4.2.4 Phase 4: Early development and pilot testing*

<b>Phase 4: Early development and pilot testing</b> Step 6: Implementing the prototype	
<b>Step 6: Implementing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners</b> <b>Chapter 5: Implementing the parenting programme</b>	
To present the parenting skills programme in two schools in resource-poor communities and assess the effect of the programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners by	Participants: Parents of Grade R learners in the two focus schools (Participant group 2) The Grade R learners of the parents in Participant group 2 (Participant group 3)
	Sampling: Purposive sampling of Participant group 2 and 3
	Research approach and design: Qualitative/intervention research: The parenting skills programme was presented to Participant group 2 and 3
	Method of data collection:

using qualitative data.	<p>Audio recordings of sessions with Participant group 2</p> <p>Ethics: Written consent was obtained from Participant group 2 and verbal assent from the Grade R learners (Participant group 3). The researcher strove to uphold the values of voluntary participation, confidentiality and no harm to participants. There were also some benefits for the participants as they gained new knowledge and skills and the parents and their children spent quality time together during the sessions.</p>
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The prototype or preliminary intervention was implemented in three schools in the two target areas. This process is described in detail in Chapter 6.

**Sampling:** The Grade R learners as well as their parents that were in three schools (P and N) in communities R and E, were the target population. This process closely resembled the EPSEM or equal probability of selection method. According to Babbie (2010:199) a basic principle of this method of sampling is when all members of the population have an equal chance of being included in the sample.

Inclusion criteria for Participant group 2 were:

- All the parents of Grade R learners of the three focus schools were invited
- Afrikaans or English speaking (the parents of the focus schools were all either Afrikaans or English speaking).
- Members of R community or E community.

The only exclusion criterium was that no former or present social work client of the researcher was allowed to participate.

Inclusion criteria for Participant group 3: Grade R children of Participant group 2 between the ages of 5 and 6 years. If parents had more than one child in Grade R between the ages 5 and 6 years (i.e. in the case of twins), they were all included.

It was one of the researcher’s challenges to motivate parents to attend. Challenges that might be encountered when doing intervention research in schools are described by Mishna, Muskat and Cook (2012:137-140). These include obtaining the approval and cooperation of the school principals and school governing bodies and gaining the involvement of educators, as well as participant dropout. The researcher obtained the support of the principals of the focus schools and they acted as gatekeepers. The researcher requested them to send a letter of invitation to the parents and to encourage them at parent meetings to participate. Those parents who responded, were invited to attend the first session of the programme together with their children, where the

implications of the research and the content of the consent form were discussed. They were then requested to sign informed consent and to obtain verbal assent from their children.

**Research approach and design:** A qualitative approach was used. The steps in early development and pilot testing of intervention research, as described by Rothman and Thomas (1994), guided this part of the study. The prototype as designed during phase 2, was presented to Participant groups 2 and 3 at the three schools.

**Method of data collection:** The implementation of the prototype took place in the focus schools as part of the researcher's work, since parenting skills training was an integral part of her work. The research took place with the full permission and support of the school principals. The prototype consisted of 12 sessions of one hour each. At the school where the programme was presented during school hours, the first half of each hour was spent with Participant group 2, sharing with them one principle of parenting. They then fetched their Grade R children from their classrooms and the second half hour was spent with both Participant groups 2 and 3 doing activities and playing games to reinforce the principle of parenting that the parents were instructed in. In order to accommodate working parents, the programme was presented on Saturdays at two of the schools. These parents came along with their Grade R children and the children sat with their parents and kept themselves busy with colouring pages and crayons while the researcher addressed the parents. They were then available to proceed to participate in the activities with their parents. The rationale of the practical part of the programme was to ensure that the parents obtained practical experience that they could then repeat at home. The researcher acted as facilitator and explained to the parents what activities they had to do with their children. The children were under the direct supervision of their parents and the researcher was never involved in the activities with the children herself. The programme did not interfere with school work because the learners only joined once their school day ended when other parents came to fetch their children at school.

The sessions with the parents and learners were audio recorded to capture all verbal communication since the researcher was not be able to take notes during the sessions (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:340; Creswell, 2016:172; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:94). Continuous observation and reflection by the researcher, as well as occasional informal feedback by participants after sessions were used to assess whether the programme had the desired outcomes for the parents and learners. This enabled the researcher to judge whether the programme had to be adapted if it did not yield the desired results.

1.4.2.5 Evaluation and advanced development

<b>Phase 5: Experimental evaluation and advanced development</b> <b>Step 7: Evaluating the parenting programme</b>	
<b>Step 7: Evaluate the success of the parenting skills programme in terms of enhancing the school readiness of Grade R learners</b> <b>Chapter 6</b>	
<b>Question 4</b> What is the effect/influence of the developed parenting skills programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners in two resource-poor communities?	Participants: Parents of Grade R learners who attended the parenting programme
	Sampling: Purposive sampling of at least 9 participants
	Research approach and design: Qualitative/intervention research
	Method of data collection: Informal discussion with Participant group 2 after sessions and semi-structured interviews with 9 participating parents Audio recordings of semi-structured interviews with Participant group 2
	Minor adaptations to the programme Presentation of the programme to Participant groups 4 and 5
	Semi-structured interviews with 4 parents from Participant group 4
	Data analysis: Qualitative data: Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun, 2013)
	Ethics: Written consent was obtained from participants. The researcher upheld the values of voluntary participation, confidentiality and no harm to participants.

After the initial presentation of the prototype, interviews were conducted with nine parents of the three groups (in the three focus schools). Semi-structured interviews (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:340; Braun & Clarke, 2013:92; Engelbrecht, 2016:113; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:12) were used to obtain their views on how their participation in the programme had influenced their parenting practices and their Grade R children’s school readiness/development. The researcher made use of open-ended questions to capture the richness of the participants’ unique viewpoints and she was flexible and responsive to participants, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013:79) and Nieuwenhuis (2016:93). Interviews were audio recorded with the participants’ consent for greater accuracy and data capturing (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:340; Braun & Clarke, 2013:92). Data collection was an interactive process where the researcher could verify her understanding and interpretation through her interaction with the participants (Williams, *et al.*, 2005:81). The data collected from the nine

interviews were positive and indicated that the prototype was yielding the desired results. Minor changes were made to the parenting programme and the programme was presented to another group of parents in one of the target schools the following year. Interviews were then conducted with five of the parents of this group. Data saturation signifies the point where no new data emerges and the process of data capturing is adequate (Engelbrecht, 2016:112). The data gathered from the last four interviews were similar to that of the previous nine interviews and no significant new data emerged. It was then decided that data saturation had been reached.

Data analysis: Data analysis in qualitative research takes place simultaneously with data collection and begins with the first interview, observation and documentation that were used. This provides the opportunity to make adjustments as the research progresses (Bless, et al., 2013:341). It was envisaged that thematic data analysis as discussed under 1.4.2.2 above, would be used to analyse the data obtained. Data collection and analysis formed a continuous process, starting with the initial focus group discussions, continuing during the implementation of the prototype and then through the interviews with Participant groups 2 and 4 and their input into the programme (Bless, et al., 2013:341). Writing was an integral part of analysis through regular reflective journaling and culminating in report writing (Braun & Clarke, 2006:86). The issue that the data analysis had to resolve was whether the parenting practices of the participants had been enriched and school readiness of the Grade R learners enhanced.

To apply crystallization to arrive at findings that are rich in meaning and depth as described by Ellingson (2009:2), the researcher applied the following suggestions in the data analysis process:

- The researcher involved participants in discussing the data by reflecting their statements and comments back to them during sessions as well as during the semi-structured interviews to verify that it was a true reflection of what they meant. This provided different perspectives and data from different angles.
- The researcher refrained from making definite claims, and instead of clinging to stereotypes and the researcher's own preconceived ideas, the researcher endeavoured to be open to participants' thoughts and opinions.
- The researcher invited participants to give feedback about the research. This was done weekly during the sessions as well as through semi-structured interviews.

<b>Phase 6: Dissemination</b>
Step 8: Dissemination will form the final step in the process of intervention research

	<p>Dissemination will include the following:</p> <p>The parenting programme has been presented to other groups of parents and the researcher will continue to share it</p> <p>The results of the research will be shared with the focus groups and other interested parties</p> <p>An article was submitted to and approved by an academic journal.</p>
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#### 1.4.2.6 Phase 6: Dissemination of information (Step 8)

Dissemination of the research results was the final step in the intervention research process as described in literature (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010:468). The researcher shared the results with the principals of the three schools. The researcher proceeded to present the programme to parents in two other schools in the target communities and is planning to continue presenting it in other schools. The researcher still plans to share the programme with the researcher's colleagues as well as with the social workers and other interested professionals in the communities. If the parents of the participating groups express a need to receive feedback, the researcher will arrange a meeting with them at the schools to discuss the findings with them.

### 1.4.3 Research ethics

Research ethics deals with the relationship between the researcher and the participants in the study and it is in essence an expression of respect for people, fairness and justice, giving top priority to the well-being of participants and respect for communities (Thomas, 2009:8-9). Social workers work with vulnerable people and should be specifically aware of ethical issues at the outset of research projects. The researcher is a social worker who must adhere to the Code of Ethics of the SA Council for Social Service Professions. The following ethical issues were of relevance particularly to this study:

#### 1.4.3.1 Ethical clearance:

The research proposal was submitted to the Human Research Ethics Committee of NWU (HREC) for ethical clearance and regular monitoring reports were submitted to HREC for the duration of the study (Ethics number: NWU-00140-14-A1).

#### 1.4.3.2 Voluntary participation:

Social research represents an intrusion in people's lives and they are required to share personal information and to deviate from their normal daily activities (Babbie, 2010:64). Informed consent and voluntary participation were basic ethical considerations that were adhered to (Du Plessis, 2016:73; Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32).

Participants of Participant group 1 were the professionals working in the target communities. The researcher had to take into account that both the social workers and educators worked under pressure and no undue pressure was exercised to persuade them to participate. The researcher had to be considerate of their time. Since the researcher stood in a working relationship with both these groups, the researcher had to assure the participants that their participation or refusal to participate would not influence the researcher's professional relationship with them. Participation of the focus group with the parents of Grade 1 learners who formed part of Participant group 1, took place separately from the focus groups with teachers and social workers, to ensure that the parents would not feel intimidated by the presence of professionals. The researcher explained to all three groups that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to refuse participation if they felt uneasy or distressed.

With regards to Participant groups 2 and 3, no pressure or coercion was put on any parents to participate or to continue with the programme should they have wished otherwise. At the first session, voluntary participation and confidentiality were explained to the parents before they were asked to sign the consent form. As Participant groups 3 and 5 included 5 or 6 year olds at the time, verbal assent had to be obtained from them by the parents. It was further explained to the participants that they were free to leave the venue should they have felt uncomfortable or distressed.

#### 1.4.3.3 *Inclusion of vulnerable population*

Working with vulnerable participants requires special considerations and researchers need to be sensitive to their needs (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:34). The researcher needed to justify why research in two vulnerable communities had been proposed. The researcher postulated that there was little need for the parenting programme in prosperous, affluent communities, because the quality of parenting in such communities is generally better and those parents have access to resources that poor people do not have, including educational facilities and programmes. To include vulnerable populations, was part of the motivation for this study, as was outlined above. As mentioned in the problem statement, the Department of Education's White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (2001:5) states that approximately 40% of children in South Africa grow up in conditions of extreme poverty and neglect, leading to an increased risk of stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, failing grades and eventually dropout from school. The effect of poverty, poor parenting and the devastating social problems in the communities where the researcher plans to conduct the research, pose a serious risk to children's social, emotional and academic development and impact negatively on school readiness. Several authors describe the distressing cumulative effect as well as the problems associated with poverty on the development of children (Beatty, 2013:71; Mistry, *et al.*, 2010:433; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010:26). However, White Paper 5 of the Department of Education (2001:3) acknowledges that the effects of early deprivation can be

reversed by timely and appropriate interventions. The Department therefore makes provision for establishing a national accredited Reception Year Program (Grade R) for all children five years of age, to prepare them for entering Grade 1. The researcher believed that the cycle of poverty and other social problems could be addressed effectively by improving the quality of the parenting in these vulnerable communities and by improving children's learning opportunities.

Participants of Participant group 1 participated in their professional capacity and were not required to divulge any personal information. They might therefore not have felt as vulnerable as the other Participant groups. However, time constraints were a limiting factor and the researcher did not put pressure on them to participate if work pressure or other pressures prevented them from participating. The researcher had to assure participants that their participation or refusal to do so would not influence the researcher's professional relationship with them.

The focus group with the parents of Grade 1 learners who formed part of Participant group 1 took place separate from the focus groups with teachers and social workers to ensure that the parents did not feel intimidated by the presence of professionals.

Regarding Participant group 2 and 3, they were involved in their personal capacity and there was also a greater imbalance of authority between the researcher and the participants. The researcher put the following measures in place to counter this imbalance and to empower the participants to feel worthy and capable:

- Repeating at every session that participation was voluntary and that participants' decision to withdraw from the programme would in no way harm their Grade R child or their relationship with the school;
- Being warm and welcoming;
- Encouraging participants to make contributions by explaining that, as parents, they had expert opinions, but never putting pressure on anyone to contribute;
- Leaving the way open for parents to leave the programme if, at any stage before or during sessions, they felt uncomfortable.
- Making Grade R learners aware that, should they experience discomfort or distress, they would be free to leave at any time. The researcher also requested parents to be sensitive to their children's needs in this regard.

#### 1.4.3.4 *Written informed consent and assent*

Goodwill permission: The researcher approached the principals of the two focus schools with her protocol and with the permission of the Department of Education. The researcher explained to them the aims of the study and discussed with them the practical arrangements, as well as the need for their support and cooperation.

Informed consent, which means that participants base their voluntary participation on a full understanding of what the research entails as well as the possible risks involved, has become increasingly important in research (Du Plessis, 2016:77; Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32; Babbie, 2010:66) and it is one of the ways in which respect for individuals can be ensured (Thomas, 2009:9). Written informed consent was obtained from all adults in the participant groups after explaining the content of the letter of consent to them. Different letters of consent were used for Participant group 1 (see Annexure E) and Participant group 2 and 4 (see Annexure F).

Assent is usually obtained from children aged 7 and older. The age of the Grade R learners in Participant group 3 was between 5 and 6 years of age, as this is the age of most Grade R learners. However, their active agreement needed to be obtained. Since they were too young to sign documents, the researcher asked the parents to explain the procedure to the learners in simple terms so that they could understand the implications as far as possible. The children were made aware that they were allowed to ask questions, that they could refuse without providing a reason and that they were allowed to withdraw at any time (Schenk & Williamson, 2005:42).

#### 1.4.3.5 Confidentiality

Confidentiality includes anonymity and protecting the identity of the participants, including withholding the names of participants, schools or communities or any other identifying details (Du Plessis, 2016:72; Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32) and it is a principle that needs to be applied throughout the research up to report writing (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32).

The parenting programme was presented on the premises of the focus schools in venues that were large enough to accommodate both Participant groups 2 and 3 and 4 and 5. The programme was presented in open groups, which made anonymity impossible. It was explained to the participants that total confidentiality in such groups was impossible and that it was not expected of them to share any sensitive information. However, the researcher strove to ensure confidentiality by applying the following measures:

- Although the participants of Participant group 1 were not involved in their personal capacity, they might nevertheless have felt that the information that they were requested to divulge, was of a sensitive nature. The researcher assured them that no names of professionals or organisations would be mentioned in the report and that they were free to share only information that they felt comfortable with.
- Confidentiality during the presentation of the parenting skills programme to Participant groups 2, 3, 4 and 5 was encouraged by explaining to participants that no names, addresses or identifying details of individuals or communities would be repeated by the researcher outside of the programme. The researcher undertook not to mention any names

when the audio recordings were transcribed. The researcher undertook not to discuss anything that was said in the group with the teachers of the Grade R learners or with any other school officials.

- The semi-structured interviews with the parents of Participant group 2 and 4 took place behind closed doors and the researcher assured the participants that their names would not be mentioned in the transcriptions.
- The researcher took care that the final report contains no details that would reveal the identity of individuals, their schools or their communities, as suggested by Reamer (2005:40).

#### 1.4.3.6 *Data storage and archive*

The transcribed data were stored on a password protected computer to which only the researcher and the researcher's study leader had access for the duration of the research. The audio recordings of sessions were stored in the same way and were only used by the researcher for data analysis purposes. After completion of the research, recorded data will be stored for 5 years in a safe at the offices of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies in Wellington. The researcher will hand it over to the study leader not later than 10 days before graduation, and the study leader will take it to the line manager at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies in Wellington. Only the line manager of the Centre will have access to the safe and she will take responsibility to destroy the data after the prescribed 5 years, which is calculated from the graduation date of the student. The line manager has a system of recordkeeping with a reminder of when the data should be destroyed.

#### 1.4.3.7 *Direct and indirect risks and benefits*

The primary aim of this research project was that the programme should be of considerable benefit to the participants by enhancing the school readiness of the Grade R learners by improving the quality of support and care that they receive from their parents. The anticipated enhanced school readiness would impact positively on the development of the children and ultimately on all the phases of their lives. This would indirectly benefit the communities in which they lived as well as possibly the economy of the country in the long run. School readiness is not only viewed as an important stepping stone in ensuring good educational outcomes for individual learners, but it has implications on a much wider scale. On a macro level, preparing children to excel academically is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing poverty and stimulating the economic growth and prosperity of a nation (UNICEF, 2012:3; Young & Richardson, 2007:9-10).

No serious risk to any participants was foreseen. Although gangsterism was rife in the one target community, the parenting programme was presented to that group on Saturday mornings when shootings were less frequent than at other times. In the case of shootings, a session would be

cancelled, but that was never necessary. The researcher stayed in contact with the focus schools to assess the safety situation. The Grade R children participated in the activities and games with their parents and they were in the care of the parents all the time. The researcher was never involved with them physically. There was no risk of stigmatization, because all parents were free to participate in this programme and participation was not an indication of problems.

Although the risk of harming participants in this proposed research project was minimal, the researcher nevertheless kept in mind that the participants, both parents and learners, could sustain emotional harm if the researcher acted in an uncaring or harsh manner or if the programme should have reactivated any unresolved issues in participants. The researcher made arrangements for follow-up intervention by independent social workers in the community as needed.

#### 1.4.3.8 *Conflict of interests*

According to Reamer (2005:41) researchers should guard against exposing participants to undue stress and discomfort to achieve their research aims. The researcher guarded against ever putting the interests of the research project above the well-being of the participants. To further avoid a conflict of interests, the researcher did not include clients as participants. Twice when participants approached her for assistance during the research, the researcher referred them to the welfare organisation rendering services in the community.

#### 1.4.3.9 *Feedback of results*

When giving feedback on results, researchers need to be accurate and honest and never try to conceal unfavourable findings (Du Plessis, 2016:77; Reamer, 2005:41). Because the researcher was personally involved in the research process, the researcher had the responsibility to acknowledge that her own values and bias could impact her observations and that she should keep this in mind in her interpretations (Nieuwenhuis, 2010:115).

Reporting back to the three different participant groups after completion of the research still has to take place and will be done differently. The researcher will contact the educators and other professionals and determine in what form they would like feedback, whether in the form of a report or personal feedback. The researcher will arrange a closing function with the participating parents and learners and provide a summary of the findings.

#### 1.4.3.10 *Remuneration and cost*

Participants were not remunerated for participating. At one target school the programme was presented at a time of day when the parents came to school to fetch their children and therefore there was not additional travelling costs for them. At the two other schools the parents had to

provide their own travelling expenses. Most of them walked to the schools. Light refreshments were served at each session.

#### 1.4.3.11 *Mediators*

No mediators were used, because it was important that the researcher deal with the participants personally to build a trusting relationship with them. If a mediator had been used, the participants might have felt apprehensive to deal with yet another person, because parents might already have been apprehensive about becoming involved in a process with a professional person unknown to them. The researcher recruited the support of the focus schools' principals to act as gatekeepers and the parenting programme was presented in the schools with the consent and support of the principals and Grade R educators.

#### 1.4.3.12 *Expertise of the researcher*

Researchers need to be professionally and personally qualified and they must be committed to their field of study (Du Plessis, 2016:77). At the time of the research the researcher was an experienced social worker with more than twenty years of experience in working with vulnerable populations. She had a Master's Degree in Social Work which entailed a quantitative study with 400+ participants. She had facilitated many programmes at schools and was experienced in interviewing and group facilitation. The researcher applied her expertise and knowledge regarding ethical codes during the research project by having regular consultation with her promoter. The promoter had 34 years of experience as social worker and as a social work supervisor. She specialized in trauma and direct work with children and families, and she had work experience in various contexts, including the resource poor communities in the Cape Peninsula where the research was conducted. She had provided study supervision for 16 Masters and 6 PhD students for the previous nine years. She was well versed in the developments of research methodology and research ethics. She was also on the research panel for the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies and she critically reviewed protocols with intervention research as design.

### **1.4.4 Trustworthiness**

The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Methods (Given & Saumure 2008:895) describes trustworthiness as 'the way in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability are evident in their research'. With this approach researchers can move beyond the rigidity of quantitative parameters to illustrate the worth of their project. In their often-cited work (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:123-125), Lincoln and Guba (1985:207) outline the four elements of trustworthiness and how these could be achieved:

#### 1.4.4.1 *Credibility*

Credibility has to do with whether the findings are a true reflection of the reality that was researched (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:123; Bless, *et al.*, 2013:236). *Credibility* can be enhanced through prolonged engagement and persistent observation. Credibility was part of this study as the researcher already spent a lot of time in the two communities, and the study was done over a number of months. It did not merely entail a quick contact for data collection, but truly prolonged engagement with persistent observation. As outlined in the research process, there was also contact with social workers, educators and parents in the initial phases and feedback to the community in the last phase. Member checking enhanced credibility.

#### 1.4.4.2 *Transferability*

Transferability is not the same as generalization but it is the extent to which the results can be applied in other similar contexts (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:237). According to Joubert (2016:139) and Nieuwenhuis (2016:124), the researcher gave a detailed account of the research context, sampling, data collection and the course of the whole research process to provide readers with the opportunity to judge whether the research could be applied to other populations. To further promote the transferability of this research, the researcher gave comprehensive descriptions of the research context, sampling, data gathering and data analysis, to enable other researchers and readers of the research report to determine how they could transfer findings to their own contexts (Shenton, 2004:69).

#### 1.4.4.3 *Dependability*

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016:124) the concepts of credibility and dependability are related. Meticulous records of all planning, sample selection, steps in the project, changes in the planning observations and data collected were kept to create an audit trail (Joubert, 2016:139; Bless, *et al.*, 2013:237) so that the study could potentially be replicated, thereby ensuring *dependability*.

#### 1.4.4.4 *Confirmability*

This concept refers to the possibility that other researchers will arrive at the same findings as the researcher (Joubert, 2016:139). Nieuwenhuis (2016:124) refers to Lincoln and Guba (1985), who describe confirmability as the degree of neutrality with which a researcher replicates the responses of participants to arrive at research results, and not allowing the researcher's own bias to cloud the findings. Shenton (2004:72) outlines the importance of presenting the information of participants without research bias, based on the researchers' preferences or pre-conceived ideas. To enhance *confirmability* the researcher made sure that processes of thematic data analysis were clearly outlined and that evidence of data analysis processes was presented in the final research report. Since the researcher needed to "immerse" herself in the research situation (Reamer, 2005:81) and enter into a relationship with the participants, subjectivity may have coloured her observations

(Nieuwenhuis, 2010:114). It was important for the researcher to acknowledge the possibility of bias and be aware of it by reflecting on it when analysing data and formulating findings.

#### *1.4.4.5 Using multiple data resources*

The term triangulation was used by the researcher denoting the use of different methods of data capturing to ensure trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004:65). However, qualitative researchers are not always comfortable with this method as it is associated more with quantitative research. As an alternative, researchers suggest the process of crystallization as described by Ellingson (2009:2) and others (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:246; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:124), using multiple approaches. The term crystallization implies that there is no absolute truth, but only partial and multiple perspectives that are constructed by researchers. Information from different sources of data such as interviews and focus groups can be compared, and if they lead to the same conclusion, the results will be more trustworthy (Ellingson, 2009:1; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:124). The researcher used her reflective journal and involved participants through informal feedback and semi-structured interviews to provide different perspectives and data from different angles. Feedback of verbal and non-verbal communication was obtained through interviews, focus groups and field notes by the researcher.

#### *1.4.4.6 Verifying and validating data*

Participants were requested to verify raw data after conversations or during subsequent interviews (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:124). After participants had told the researcher their stories, the researcher in turn shared her understanding thereof with them to check whether the researcher had interpreted them correctly (Reamer, 2005:81; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:16).

#### *1.4.4.7 Avoid generalizations*

Ellingson (2009:2) cautions researchers to refrain from making definite claims and clinging to stereotypes and preconceived ideas. Instead they should make room for participants' thoughts and opinions. The essence of qualitative research is to study and understand a situation in its uniqueness as well as the interactions within that situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:125). The researcher strove to avoid generalizations and stereotyping by viewing each participant as a unique person and valuing each input that could contribute to the richness and variety of the data.

#### *1.4.4.8 Use quotes carefully*

Bless, *et al.* (2016:239) believe that direct verbatim quotes add to the trustworthiness of a study, because it gives the reader an impression of what the participants said and how the researcher interpreted it. However, it is important that researchers do not use quotes out of context or only to partially support an argument. Quotes should only be included when enough data is given to understand the context in which it was used to convey the true meaning of the participant's words (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:125). The researcher endeavoured to use quotes only in the right context.

#### *1.4.4.9 Ensuring data saturation*

According to Bless, *et al.* (2013: 239) researchers need to continue collecting data until data saturation is achieved. In the literature study and interviews with the participants the researcher consulted resources until it seemed as if no new information emerged, thereby assuring that all the important data with regards to an aspect of the study had been captured.

#### *1.4.4.10 Acknowledge the limitations of the study*

Since the qualitative researcher is dealing with an ever-changing reality, every study encounters limitations and unforeseen problems (Nieuwenhuis, 2010:115). It was important to describe these in the final report, because it shed light on how the researcher arrived at certain findings and it may contribute to further research. The researcher addressed limitations of this study in the final chapter.

## **1.5 LAYOUT OF THE FINAL REPORT**

The research report is presented in the following chapters:

Chapter 1: Orientation and methodology

Chapter 2: The role of parents in the school readiness of Grade R learners

Chapter 3: Exploring the constructs of school readiness and parenting in resource poor communities

Chapter 4: Designing a parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners

Chapter 5: Implementing the parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities

Chapter 6: Evaluating the implementation of the parenting programme

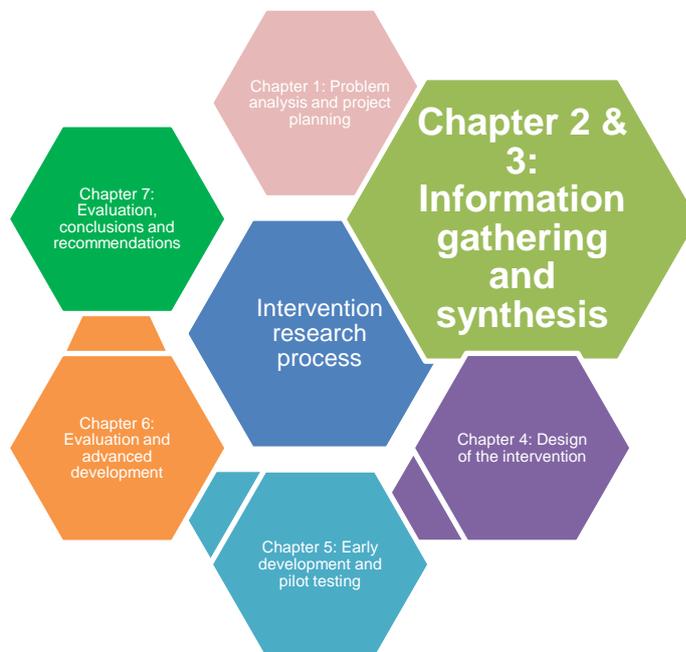
Chapter 7: Evaluation, conclusions and recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE STUDY

### THE ROLE OF PARENTING IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL READINESS IN GRADE R LEARNERS: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### Phase 1: information gathering and synthesis

Failure to provide every child with the right to thrive and to grow up to contribute to society, is a moral offense (UNICEF, 2012:v (foreword by Lake, A.)).



## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The literature study forms part of step 2 of phase 1 of the intervention research process. To design a parenting programme, the researcher made use of existing data of which literature formed an important part. This chapter deals with the role of parents in the development of school readiness in Grade R learners and it answers the following subsidiary research question as formulated in Chapter 1: What is the role of parenting in the school readiness of Grade R learners as revealed by a literature study?

The growing awareness of the devastating effect of poverty and inequality on the lives of millions of children globally, has raised deep concern for their well-being and their future. Twenty-two years

into democracy the poverty and inequality levels in South Africa remain high and the high hopes that were cherished for the new generation of the so-called 'born frees' are not being realized (De Lannoy, Leibbrandt & Frame, 2015:22). Poverty and inequality in South Africa was compounded by the apartheid regime and no significant inroads have been made to improve the situation since the election of the democratic government. The one strong weapon to combat poverty, namely education, is being thwarted by the dysfunctional school system that fails to prepare youth to enter the labour market with positive prospects (Spaull, 2015:34).

The high number of learners who drop out of school before they reach Grade 12 was mentioned in Chapter 1. Learners start dropping out from Grade 5 and one of the reasons for the huge school drop-out seems to be failing grades (Gustafsson, 2011:21). Louw, Bayat and Eigelaar-Meets (2011:17) state in their Report 4 that there is a significantly high failure rate of Grade 1 and Grade 2 in the underperforming schools that they investigated. According to Spaull, (2015:36) falling behind in school work is a major cause of dropping out and schools seem poorly equipped to support these learners to overcome the backlog and to complete their schooling. Falling behind in school starts early in learners' school careers. Studies in the Eastern Cape found that pupils were already 1,8 years behind the benchmark by Grade 3, and already 2,8 years behind by Grade 9 (Spaull, 2013:6). Ferguson, Bovaird and Mueller (2007:702) and Young (2015:42) agree that there is strong and unanimous evidence that poverty causes cognitive and behavioural delays in children, preventing them from entering the school system ready for school, and that the school system seems to be unable to equalize this gap. Prinsloo (2011:30) states that the culture of poverty in South Africa contributes to failure in school and early drop-out, due to the negative influence that it has on learners' morale, academic self-concept and on other personal attributes.

According to a survey on poverty trends by Statistics South Africa (2014:30) there is a definite link between education and poverty. While 66% of uneducated adult South Africans in 2011 were found to be poor, only 5,5% of those with a post-matric qualification were poor. The results of the survey suggest that education remains an important tool in the fight against poverty. Louw, Bayat and Eigelaar-Meets (2011:60) found in their Report 2 that poverty and the problems associated with poverty, including lack of parental care, were associated with underperforming schools in the Western Cape. In their research 65.5% of urban learners who participated, reported that a lack of parental care 'has a big effect' on them. A strong tool in the battle against poverty is, if children were to receive adequate developmental and educational opportunities to prepare them for the labour market and to become self-sustaining. In this battle, school readiness is a core variable.

According to the Centre on the Developing Child (2016:n.p.) as well as Bruwer, Hartell, and Steyn, (2014:27) learners who are not school ready in all the developmental domains, are already behind their peers when they enter the school system. McClelland, Morrison and Holmes (2000:307-308),

Ngwaru (2012:27) and Van Zyl (2011:40), believe early development is vital for school readiness, without which children cannot progress in school and have positive future prospects.

According to Lara-Cinisomo, Pebley, Vaiana and Maggio (2004:1) school readiness is important for children, for their families, and for the society. Children who are ready to learn when they begin school:

- learn faster
- become more involved in school and learning
- are more likely to stay in school and complete their schooling, and
- have more success in their career and in the workplace later in life.

Failure to invest in early childhood development leads to continued social and economic inequality and a waste of social and human capital (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani & Merali, 2006: 11; Heckman, 2008:51). Human capital is an economic concept, denoting the value of people for economic growth. Human capital development refers to the development of individuals' skills, abilities, values and social assets to increase their work performance as well as their prosperity and well-being (Marimuthu, Arokiasamy & Ismail, 2009:266). According to Heckman (2006:14; 2008:49), who is a strong advocate for investment in early child development, children need to acquire cognitive and non-cognitive skills, essential for their school performance as well as for their later economic performance, before they enter school. This will entail building human capital already from early childhood years. More and more children are born into adverse circumstances. Remediation of adversity when children are young, is much less costly than later intervention. Enriching the family environment of disadvantaged children improves both their cognitive and non-cognitive skills that are essential for personal and economic development and success (Heckman, 2008:51, 56). This could avert major economic and social problems including dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy and crime. Almond and Currie (2010:1467) support Heckman's view, stating that a decade of research on human capital development has found that the characteristics of children and their families measured at the point of school entry, are as indicative of future outcomes as other factors that economists have focused on in the past, such as years of education.

## **2.2 DESCRIPTION OF SCHOOL READINESS**

The concept of school readiness has broadened over the past decades and now encompasses a wide range of developmental skills and abilities. A child who is ready for school has the basic minimum skills and knowledge in a variety of domains that will enable the child to be successful in school (UNICEF, 2012:9). Janus and Duku, (2007:376) and Bruwer, *et al.* (2014:20) point out that the broader concept of school readiness that is currently being used, does not only put emphasis on strictly cognitive skills such as reading, writing and counting, but also on non-cognitive skills,

such as adaptability, flexibility, comfort to ask questions, cooperation with peers, respect for people and property, independence, and effective communication. Heckman (2008:50) believes the family environment is the major predictor of these skills. He places a high premium on cognitive as well as non-cognitive skills, such as perseverance, the ability to focus, motivation, and self-confidence cultivated during the early years while children are still primarily in their parents' care.

In line with the above, researchers generally agree that school readiness is a multidimensional concept, which includes physical development, social/emotional development, approaches to learning, language development and cognitive development (UNICEF, 2012: 9-10; Lau, Li & Rau, 2011:97). Furthermore, it is important to note that school readiness does not only depend on these domains as separate entities, but on the interrelationship between the different domains (UNICEF, 2012:9).

The foundational skills described above follow a definite developmental trajectory. School readiness skills are considered to be cumulative in that there exists a hierarchy of achievement based on mastering earlier goals, i.e, they build on earlier learned skills and behaviours. In this sense, readiness combines learning and development because achieving simpler skills allows for the acquisition of higher and more complex skills (Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2000:2). Children entering primary school, for example, need to have a working vocabulary to master reading skills. In other words, learning achievement in school is the product of a process of acquiring skills from birth. Heckman (2008:50) states it differently: 'skill begets skill; motivation begets motivation' and if children are not motivated to learn and become engaged early in life, they will probably fail later on in life.

Although the focus of this study is on the role of parents in children's school readiness, the three dimensions of readiness, as described by UNICEF (2012:7), Nonoyama-Tarumi and Bredenberg (2009:40) and Bruwer (2014:8) deserve mentioning. The dimensions need to be in tandem with one another, without which successful transition of children into the formal school system is not possible. These dimensions are:

Ready children	This aspect focuses on children's learning and development (UNICEF 2012:7). School readiness is not an event that suddenly 'happens' before the child enters school. Rather, as mentioned, it is the developmental outcome of the child's life from birth up to this point. School readiness will be discussed in full later in this chapter.
Ready schools	Ready schools create an environment that is structured to support and

	<p>encourage a smooth transition for children into the formal school system and to promote the learning of all children. A ready school should offer a high quality teaching to all children within a relationship with a teacher that is mutually respectful and responsive. A school environment that promotes a feeling of safety and inclusivity will be conducive to learning (UNICEF, 2012:7). When children enter school ready to learn, educators have the opportunity and responsibility to build into them an eagerness to learn and an active engagement in the learning process that will last throughout their lives (Bowman, <i>et al.</i>, 2001:2). According to Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:457) school can be a source of joy for children, a place to learn new skills, build relationships and get to know themselves. However, for vulnerable children it can become a place of rejection, stigmatization and discrimination, where their full participation in learning and recreation is prevented.</p>
Ready families	<p>Ready families contain supportive parental attitudes, a stimulating home environment, a commitment to education and involvement in children's early learning and development, and transition to school (UNICEF 2012:7; Nonoyama-Tarumi &amp; Bredenberg, 2009:40). This aspect will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.</p>

The focus of this study is on the role of parents in the development of school readiness in Grade R learners. A comprehensive description of ready parents and the role that parents play in the development of each domain of school readiness will follow.

### **2.2.1 Concept of school readiness in the South African context**

As referred to in Chapter 1 regarding South African Grade R learners, the check list for school readiness as described in the Foundation Phase Training Manual: Grade R (2012:114) for guide educators, is the following:

Does the learner

- accept the absence of the parent without becoming upset;
- accept adult authority;
- submit him-/herself to routine;
- regulate his/her own behaviour;
- sit and listen for a reasonable length of time to educators;
- complete simple tasks independently;
- work in a group;
- understand the Language of Learning and Teaching (LOLT);

- respond to simple instructions;
- have an adequate vocabulary to express him-/herself;
- understand and speak confidently in the mother tongue;
- distinguish between what he/she sees and listens to;
- know the difference between a word and a picture;
- join in when singing and saying rhymes;
- solve simple problems;
- build jigsaw puzzles;
- manipulate crayons or thick pencils and scissors.

Still in the South African context, Davin and Van Staden (2005:2-4) describe the learning outcomes of Grade R that will render them ready for school within the three main Grade R learning areas, namely numeracy, literacy and life skills:

Learning outcomes for an integrated emergent **numeracy** programme:

- Knowledge of basic mathematical concepts such as little, more, less, the same, and how to practically apply these concepts;
- A number concept of at least 10 and the ability to apply this in activities and concrete manipulations;
- A concept of spatial positions, including on top, in front, behind, under;
- Basic knowledge of scientific concepts such as observation, prediction, classification and comparison and applying these in scientific activities;
- The ability to use learning skills including problem solving, logical reasoning and creative thinking and applying these in concrete simple activities;
- A basic concept of technology and how to apply it responsibly;
- Inquisitiveness towards nature and the laws of nature.

Learning outcomes for an integrated **literacy** programme:

The focus is here on the ability to communicate effectively. Grade R learners need to

- be able to communicate with ease and clarity in their mother tongue. They need to communicate and listen in a group situation;
- be able to reason and obtain information in their mother tongue;
- have some knowledge of a second language, preferably English if their home language is not English;
- understand the basic principles of reading and writing through exposure to a language rich environment;
- listen to and understand age appropriate stories, rhymes and song;

- develop the perceptual skills necessary for reading and writing;
- feel positive about reading and regard reading as a source of knowledge and enjoyment.

In learning outcomes for an integrated **life skills** programme Grade R learners need to:

- possess the necessary self-confidence and positive self-concept to enter the wider school environment;
- have sufficient emotional control and the ability to express their emotions in a socially acceptable way;
- be age appropriately independent in caring for themselves, dressing, toilet routine and using eating utensils;
- take responsibility for their own safety and hygiene by obeying basic rules;
- have the ability to build positive relationships with peers and adults and to assert himself when necessary;
- respect and obey basic values and norms of the community;
- understand and respect the needs of other people;
- be able to take responsibility for completing age appropriate tasks;
- understand how important learning is and be excited to go to school.

Together with the learning outcomes mentioned above, children should thrive in several domains of development in order to achieve school readiness. According to the bioecological systems theory, human development is the result of the continuous and progressively more complex interaction between the children and the microsystems (people, objects and symbols) in their immediate environment. Enduring interactions within the immediate environment are referred to as proximal processes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:797; Eamon, 2001:257). School readiness as part of development is then also the result of children's interactions with their immediate environment (Kingsbury, 2013:3). Although the exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem exercise an influence on development through distal processes, the family is the key role player in the development of the preschool child (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243). The focus of this literature study is the role that parents play in the school readiness of Grade R children as part of the process of developing a parenting programme. The different domains of school readiness, as well as the role that parents play in the development of each of these domains, will now be discussed.

## **2.3 DOMAINS OF DEVELOPMENT AS COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL READINESS**

### **2.3.1 Physical well-being and motor development**

School ready children are physically healthy and fit enough to be active and to participate in activities in the classroom and on the playground. This domain includes perceptual development and gross and fine motor development (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:4; Barbarin, *et al.*, 2008:674).

Movement comes naturally for babies and they need movement as much as they need nourishment and sleep (Pieterse, 2007:87). Movement is a prerequisite for learning readiness. There is a growing awareness that movement and physical exercise improve the brain's functioning and enhance learning (Du Plessis, 2016:22; Krog & Kruger, 2011:73). Through movement, at first spontaneously and later more deliberately, babies' proprioceptive sense develops, through which they get to know their own bodies as well as their bodies in relation to the world around them. The proprioceptive sense enables babies to form an inner body map, informing them of their physical body position and the intricate characteristics of the space in which they move around (Du Plessis, 2016:24).

Motor development enables movement and comprises of gross motor and fine motor development. Large movements such as crawling and walking depend on gross muscle development, and finer hand movements such as drawing or fastening of buttons, depend on fine motor development. Together these two skills are essential for school readiness as well as the child's later development (Pieterse, 2007:87).

#### *2.3.1.1 Fine motor development.*

Fine motor development includes strengthening the small muscles and developing eye-hand-coordination. Improved eye-hand co-ordination enables preschoolers to guide their hands with their eyes. They learn to cut with scissors, manipulate writing materials and draw shapes and recognizable human figures. They also learn to master the finer points of dressing, including doing up buttons and zippers (Davies, 2011:253; Pieterse, 2007:97; Strydom, 2011:109).

#### *2.3.1.2 Gross motor development*

Gross motor development is the development of the large muscles in the body. The physical skills of preschoolers develop rapidly and they gain improved control over their large muscles. They become stronger and can co-ordinate the movements of their body and limbs. They need vigorous exercise such as climbing, skipping and running (Davies, 2011:252). By the time they are six years old they can catch and throw objects, kick a rolling ball, dribble a ball, walk heel-toe on a balancing bar, do somersaults and ride a tricycle (Pieterse, 2007:90; Strydom, 2011:109).

Strydom (2011:109) points out the importance that children acquire physical intelligence, which means that they understand how their bodies work and how to take care of it. When children enter school with insufficient fine and gross motor development, they cannot participate in classroom activities, which then prevents them from progressing academically and this can lead to low self-esteem and behaviour problems (Bruwer, 2014:116). Globally speaking, Lake (2011:1277) and Eamon (2001:257) as well as Atmore (2013:156) and Fleisch (2008:76) in the South African context, state that poverty, with its accompanying poor nutrition and poor health, impacts negatively on thousands of children's school readiness, jeopardizing their school attendance and later their academic achievement. Strydom (2011:108-109) adds that socio-economic problems such as poverty and homelessness, parents' ignorance of good nutrition or harsh physical treatment and punishment of their children from a very early age, could seriously compromise children's physical development.

### 2.3.1.3 *Perceptual development*

Humans have sensory receptors, the ears, eyes, skin, nostrils and tongue and sensation occurs when these receptors interact with the environment. Perceptual development is learning to interpret what is sensed. Sound waves enter the ear and move to the auditory nerve to cause auditory sensation and they are interpreted as music or noise. When rays of light enter the eye through the retina and travel to the visual centre of the brain, visual sensation takes place and a person sees light, colours or patterns (Santrock, 2014:150). Sensations are meaningless unless a person learns to interpret it. Although some perceptual traits are innate, such as babies of a few weeks old that prefer to look at patterned objects with contrasting colours, perceptual development is shaped by learning and experience (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:168-169; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:177). Culture plays an important role in perceptual development, determining how sensory inputs should be interpreted. It also plays a determining role where new perceptual skills will be added to innate ones and causing children to lose unused skills (Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:155). Intermodal perception means integrating sensations from two or more different sources into one, such as smelling, tasting and seeing something and interpreting it as a certain kind of food. Babies are not born with intermodal perception, but develop it during the second half of their first year (Santrock, 2014:159). The following visual processing checklist provides a guideline to the perceptual skills that preschoolers need to master in order to be school ready (Edwards, 1987:7):

*Perceptual constancy:* to differentiate shapes, match objects according to size (bigger, smaller, middle-sized), identify colours and can arrange shades from darkest to lightest, counting by pointing to objects.

*Visual discrimination:* can distinguish different objects and match pictures in a card game, can find hidden objects in a picture.

*Part-whole perception:* to start building puzzles if pictures are bold and pieces not too small.

*Memory*: can recall 5 objects on a tray, can remember a simple story or event fairly accurately, can remember where a toy was put, can recall 5 numbers (e.g. telephone number).

Perceptual problems such as visual or auditory impairment can cause academic delays once Grade R learners enter the formal school system. Problems with intermodal integration, that is integrating visual, auditory and tactile information, will cause problems with reading, writing and copying from the blackboard (Jooste & Jooste, 2011:432-433).

It is clear that children need to be physically healthy and well developed in order to be school ready. Considering the statistics with regards to poverty in South Africa as mentioned above, it is alarming to think how many children coming from impoverished backgrounds are robbed of the opportunity to become school ready and to develop optimally. In the next section, cognitive development as a component of school readiness and the role that parents play, will be discussed.

### **2.3.2 Cognitive development**

According to the WCED Training Manual for Grade R educators (2012:114), learners need to acquire the following cognitive skills prior to school entry:

- Sufficient understanding of the language of teaching and learning
- Understand and speak confidently in their mother tongue
- Ability to respond to simple instructions
- The ability to distinguish between what they see and what they listen to
- Understand the difference between a word and a picture
- Ability to page through a book
- Ability to join in when singing a song or saying a rhyme
- Ability to solve simple problems
- Ability to build a jig-saw puzzle

Cognition refers to the thinking processes that enable children to know, to learn and to remember what they learn. It enables children to make meaning of what they learn through comparing, sorting and drawing logical conclusions. Neural networks in the prefrontal cortex, the site of higher cognitive functions, mature considerably during the preschool years (Arnold, *et al.*, 2006:5; The Data Book, 2013). Through neuro-imaging studies scientists have been able to prove that five-year-old preschoolers are more flexible thinkers than three-year-olds and they already have more advanced problem solving strategies (Moriguchi & Hiraki, 2009:6020). Preschoolers start to remember songs and rhymes, use shapes, colours, size, numbers and other symbols to explore the world and themselves and learn to recognise single letters and numbers. They learn to draw a person with different body parts. They learn to investigate and solve problems, such as building

puzzles. They learn the names and characteristics of objects in their world and the relationship between them (Cross, 2006:1-2).

Historically there has been a difference of opinion between researchers regarding the role of innate factors in the child, as opposed to the role of the environment, including parents, in children's cognitive development (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:187; Wade, 2004:199). In this regard there are several widely accepted learning theories that emphasize different aspects of learning but they also have similarities.

**Jean Piaget** was interested in the origin of knowledge and his theory of cognitive development places emphasis on the role of the child in this developmental process (Galotti, 2011:18; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:42-43). Piaget researched children's ability to organize thinking patterns to solve problems and understand things. He discovered that children create knowledge through interaction with their environment and that they actively work at acquiring new knowledge. Piaget believed that children are born with the capacity to organize cognitive structures or schemas and integrate them into progressively more complex systems through assimilation into existing schemas or through accommodation, which is creating new schemas (Galotti, 2011:20; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:32). Piaget proposed a stages theory of cognitive development that entails four stages and spans from birth to adolescence:

*Sensori-motor stage (0-2 years):* Babies explore their environment through their sensory and motor capabilities (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:55). They learn to repeat pleasurable or interesting activities that they discovered by chance. The original involuntary action is converted into a schema. Later toddlers develop curiosity and explore their world. They use trial and error to try out new activities. Towards the end of this stage, toddlers acquire the capacity for symbolic thought, which enables them to start thinking about events, anticipate consequences and use symbols (Martorell, Pappalia & Feldman, 2014:184-185).

*Pre-operational stage (2-6 years):* Grade R learners fall into the end phase of the pre-operational stage, during which children's thinking is still egocentric, which means that they are unable to see things from someone else's viewpoint or they do not realise that other people have different viewpoints from their own. They also cannot apply realistic and logical principles to understand the world and solve problems. To prove this, Piaget used various activities, such as the well-known conservation of number and quantity experiments, which means that they are not yet able to correctly observe that the number of objects in two rows or the quantity of liquid in two glasses are the same, even when they appear different. However, by the time that children reach six years, their use of language improves, they make use of symbolic play and they use *semiotic function* (using one thing to represent another during play).

Six-year-olds start to move into the concrete operational phase, when they develop more stable, comprehensive mental operations. They start to understand cause and effect and they can organize events, objects and people into categories. They can pay attention to more than one aspect of a situation, they are able to distinguish between appearance and reality and they learn to understand another person's perspective. By this time they learn conservation of number and quantity (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:36-39; Galotti, 2011:25-26). Although children's thinking is still egocentric, they do develop the capacity for empathy with others' feelings (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014: 275).

*The concrete-operational stage (6/7-12 years):* Six-year-olds start to move into the concrete operational phase, when they develop more stable, comprehensive mental operations. At about seven years, they develop the ability to think logically because they can pay attention to more than one aspect of a situation. They start to use mental operations to solve concrete problems. They are able to distinguish between appearance and reality and they learn to understand another person's perspective. They learn *conservation of number and quantity*, which means that they can correctly observe that the number of objects in two rows or the quantity of liquid in two glasses are the same, even when they appear different (Galotti, 2011:25-26; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:36-39). Piaget believed that children in this stage can reason inductively (applying an aspect or characteristic of the individuals in a class or group, to the group as a whole) but not deductively (applying aspects that are characteristic of a group or class to individuals belonging to that group). Their mathematical abilities become more sophisticated; they can count in their head, count forwards and backwards and solve simple story problems. They learn to categorise and put subclasses together, for example different flowers belonging to the same class (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:360-361). However, they cannot yet apply realistic and logical principles to understand the world and solve problems (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:36-39).

*Formal operational stage (12 years and older):* During adolescence the highest form of cognitive development, namely formal operations, is reached. Adolescents' use of symbolic thought improves and they are able to apply this in mathematics. They can meditate on possibilities and formulate hypothesis. By considering many different options and possibilities and selecting one option, they can solve complex abstract problems. They can integrate what they have learnt in the past with present content and they can use this to plan for the future (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:448; Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:223).

Several other theories of development take a more holistic view and place more emphasis on cognitive development as a function of the interaction between children and their environment. The Gestalt field theory advocates a holistic approach where the children are seen as part of a 'field' in

which they live and they need to be studied as an inseparable part of the whole. The 'field' is dynamic and ever changing and phenomena are determined by all the components in the 'field'. Children's development must therefore be studied as part of a dynamic interactional process in which causality is dynamic and complex (Parlett, 1991:3; Schultz, 2013:31). This view corresponds largely with Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory that child development emerges from continuous interactions between the child and the context in which he grows up. Although the family plays a key role in this context, the child is regarded as an active participant in his own development (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243).

Lev Vygotsky, a contemporary of Piaget, formulated a social constructivist theory of development. He agreed with Piaget that the child is an active participant in constructing his own knowledge, but he did not place as much emphasis on children as independent explorers developing on their own. He proposed that children's cognitive development takes place through social interactions with the people around them, including parents, educators and others with more superior knowledge (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:93; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:71; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:56). This process takes place within the context of the values, traditions and beliefs of the child's culture. Babies are endowed with elementary mental functions, including attention, sensation and perception. Culture provides the basic tools for the development of higher mental functions. In this way children learn how to think. The values and beliefs of a culture teach children what to think (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:71; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:56). Vygotsky introduced the concept of the more knowledgeable other (MKO), which is a person who has more superior knowledge or skills than the child and could be a parent, sibling or teacher (Dowling, 2014:35). Much of the important content that children learn, takes place through collaborative interaction between this more knowledgeable other, who models the activity and offers support and advice, and the child who observes and imitates. The new skill is then internalized and the child's behaviour is regulated accordingly (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:282-283). Vygotsky called this process operating in the zone of proximal development, which signifies the distance between what children are capable of on their own and what they can achieve with the guidance and encouragement of their parents or MKO (or a task that the child might not have mastered yet, but is within his grasp if appropriate support is provided). Vygotsky reasoned that children might not be able to master Einstein's theory of relativity, but they might learn age appropriate tasks such as conservation of number or quantity if the mental framework is provided by a more skilled person. When parents sensitively and patiently guide their children to master tasks that they would otherwise not have mastered on their own, cognitive growth takes place and new skills are internalized (Dowling, 2014:35; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:71; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:282-283). The concept of a more knowledgeable other is important for this study where the research is aimed at equipping a person in the child's microsystem to advance their skills in being the knowledgeable other for the Grade R learner.

Contemporary research confirms Vygotsky's viewpoint. Lukie, Skwarchuk, LeFevre and Sowinski (2014:257) studied the influence of parents on preschoolers' literacy and numeracy development and they found that learning is maximized when parents interact meaningfully with their children and expose them to a variety of new opportunities and activities. Roberts (2002:6), the Centre on the Developing Child of Harvard University (2016:n.p.) and the Data Book (2013) state that brain development is the result of the interplay between genes and the experiences that children are exposed to, and that early experiences have a decisive impact on the wiring of the brain. To what extent their innate abilities will develop, depends on the input and encouragement that they receive from their environment, where parents are the main role players (Arnold, *et al.*, 2006:5; Bernier, Carlson & Whipple, 2010:326; Centre on the Developing Child, Harvard University, 2011a; Roberts, 2002:6).

### **The role of parents in the cognitive development of children**

Regarding parental behaviours that have an impact, Eshel, Daelmans, de Mello and Martines (2006:992) found in their literature review of research done in developed countries, that maternal responsiveness was most often associated with language, cognitive and psychosocial development. It contributed uniquely to language acquisition, even after considering other factors such as poverty. Jackson and Needham (2014:39) and Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry and Childs (2004:474) believe that parental activities such as reading to a child at home, providing books and magazines, providing opportunity for educational activities, and asking a child about school, showed the strongest connection with later preschool classroom competencies. Jackson and Needham (2014:41) discuss several studies confirming that parents' educational activities with their children inside and outside the home, played a greater role in later achievement than socio-economic factors. These activities were related to children's positive attitude to learning, especially motivation, attention and task persistence, and they were positively linked to receptive vocabulary. Marais, Ingle, Skinner, and Sigenu (2012:90) quote Esping-Anderson (2005:31) who states that a child's life chances hinge powerfully on his cognitive development before his entrance into the formal school system.

On the downside, Mistry, *et al.*, (2010:445) found that cumulative risks in the family, especially in the form of socio-economic hardship, had a profoundly detrimental effect on children's cognitive development and academic progress. These researchers found that adverse social circumstances that parents faced, negatively affected the parental warmth and quality of cognitive stimulation that the children received, which then impacted negatively on their developmental outcomes. Ferguson, *et al.* (2007:702) state that there is strong and unanimous evidence that poverty causes cognitive and behavioural delays in children, preventing them from becoming ready for school. Fantuzzo, Rouse, McDermott and Sekino (2005:582) and McLoyd (1998:185,191) found that specific factors within the family contribute significantly to children's early success or failure in

school. Poverty, low maternal education and single parenthood were found to be significant causal factors of poor academic performance and behavioural problems. These factors were associated with social problems such as high density living conditions, poor housing and other social problems, as well as a lack of cognitive stimulation in the home. Naudeau, *et al.* (2011:11) add to the list of risk factors the lack of responsive parenting, maternal depression and stress, poor nutrition and a lack of environmental stimulation. Also, when parents lack the knowledge and means to expose their child to opportunities for cognitive growth, the child does not develop to his full capacity. In the South African context, Bruwer, *et al.* (2014:27) found that, when parents from deprived backgrounds had no idea what the formal school system will require from their children, the children did not acquire the cognitive skills necessary for them to deal with new knowledge that was imparted to them in the classroom.

On the positive side, Mitchell and Ziegler (2013:187) refer to a study by Elardo, Bradley and Caldwell (1975) that was done with children from six to thirty-six months old from economically challenged homes. When the parents were supported to enrich their home environment with structured play, regular reading, the way that they spoke to their children, outings, less harsh parenting and more verbal communication, there was a significant improvement in the children's intelligence. This study was repeated by other researchers using adopted children and, although not as high, the gain in IQ was clearly evident. Mitchell and Ziegler (2013:187) postulate that not only intellectual stimulation played a role, but also the nurturing attitude of the parents. Jackson and Needham (2014:40) agree with these findings when they cite Biddulph, Biddulph and Biddulph (2003) who found in longitudinal research that family processes play a more important role in children's educational attainment than socio-economic conditions. These studies suggest that parents in challenging circumstances can be supported to improve the quality of their parenting as well as the learning environment that they create in their homes, with significant benefits for their children's school readiness.

#### 2.3.2.1 *Language and communication skills*

As already mentioned, children who are ready for school in South Africa should be able to understand the language of instruction and speak confidently in their mother tongue (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:22; WCED Training Manual for Grade R educators, 2012:114). They should have enough vocabulary to express their own needs and understand and respond to simple instructions in the classroom. They need to understand the language of teaching and learning and understand the content of what is taught (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:22). They also need the ability to distinguish between what they see and listen to, and know the difference between a word and a picture (WCED Training Manual for Grade R educators, 2012:114).

The importance of language development is already clear from the above. Language development forms the foundation of intellectual development. According to Pieterse (2007:48) language influences children's interaction with those around them, their self-image, their eagerness to learn, as well as their social and emotional development. All subsequent learning is based on language. From the start there are two processes at work in the development of babies' vocabulary, namely what the babies hear (receptive vocabulary) and what they say (expressive vocabulary).

According to Pieterse (2007:50) a typical Grade R learner of about five years old may have a receptive vocabulary of around 20 000 – 24 000 words and an expressive language of around 2 200 words. These include words that indicate time, special position, conjunctions ('but' and 'because'), the proper use of nouns and pronouns and sentences of five to six words. A six-year-old begins to understand verbal problems, provide answers to them, understand and describe similarities and differences between objects such as different fruit, and can explain cause and effect, such as what objects will break when they fall. At this age, they already have a rudimentary knowledge of time, days of the week and yesterday, today and tomorrow. They can repeat five figures and count objects up to ten. They can identify money coins and knows which one is worth the most. Their expressive vocabulary consists of around 3 000 words (Pieterse, 2007:51).

### **The role of parents in language development**

Children learn the art of good communication from their parents, if the parents listen to the children, thereby building their self-esteem and showing them respect (Dowling, 2014:39). Early language development takes place within the relationship and through the interaction between parents and children. From birth, babies communicate their needs through crying and later through sounds and facial expressions in response to the parents' dialogue, while caring for the babies. This forms the foundation of the communication patterns that will develop later (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:406). Research has confirmed the vitally important role that parents, and different aspects of parenting, play in the language development of their preschool children. The socio-economic status of parents plays a role in the size of children's vocabulary, with parents from higher socio-economic status talking much more to their children than other parents, causing children from low socio-economic parents trailing behind in their language acquisition long before they enter school (Davies, 2011:263).

According to a study cited by the Centre on the Developing Child (2016), differences in language development are already apparent at the age of 18 months. By age 3, children of parents who are college-educated, have vocabularies 2 to 3 times larger than that of children whose parents did not complete high school. Children who were not engaged in a language-rich environment early in life, were already behind their peers by the time they started school. Hart and Risley (2003:4-9) recorded the dialogue between parents and their 7-9 month old infants in 42 families over a period

of two and a half years. The parents varied from high socio-economic status to parents who were on welfare. The conclusion was that, by the time the children were three years old, the children from professional parents had heard an average of 46-million words, the children from working class parents had heard 26-million words and the children from parents on welfare only 13-million words. The vocabulary that these children had acquired, resembled their parents' vocabulary with 98%. A follow-up study of 29 children from these families found that vocabulary growth at 3 years old strongly predicted school performance in several language skills, including receptive language and reading comprehension of 9-10 year olds.

In their research in South Africa Bruwer, *et al.*, (2014:27) found that, when learners had a limited command of the language of instruction and poor communication skills, they could not follow instructions and did not understand the work that was presented to them. This was especially true when the language of learning and teaching was not the mother tongue of the learners. Although the Western Cape Education Department encourages parents to have their children taught in their mother tongue, there is no specific policy to prohibit parents from enrolling their children in classes of another language. Thus, many parents choose English as a language of instruction for their children while their home language is Afrikaans or another indigenous language, with the dire results as mentioned above. Cloete (2016) mentioned that learners have an instant backlog that they never seem to overcome when they are not taught in their mother tongue when they enter Grade 1.

To compound the precarious situation of the 75-80% of children coming from poor households in South Africa, they do not have access to quality early education facilities, they attend low-quality schools characterized by poor quality teaching and poor educational outcomes, and a high drop-out rate (Child Gauge, 2015:39).

### 2.3.2.2 Literacy development

#### *Preliteracy skills*

Literacy skills form the foundation of a quality education and are vital for a child's continued academic success (Dove, Neuharth-Pritchett, Wright & Wallinga, 2015:174). To become proficient readers and writers, children need to enter the school system with 'pre-reading' and 'pre-writing' skills (Machet, 2002:20; Smith, *et.al.*, 2011:421; WCED, 2011:57). Children who do not learn to read and write and attach value to literacy, will be at a permanent disadvantage in their future careers. In the South African context Machet (2002:20) already expressed the opinion that the significance of literacy would increase even more as South Africa moves into the era of technology. Considering the increase in the use of technology in the past few years, this statement is much more significant than when it was expressed fourteen years ago.

Emergent literacy develops when children begin to understand that print is a form of communication (WCED, 2011:57). As well as the usual perceptual skills, children need an understanding of reading and the concept of stories, as well as a range of linguistic skills such as rhyming and alliteration. From an early age, children can be supported to develop different skills. Training in visual discrimination to sharpen the child's consideration of visual information can be done through games, jigsaw puzzles, picture matching games or sorting as well as sorting objects or shapes according to similarities or differences. This will prepare the child for discriminating between words and letters. As mentioned, children also need to learn the difference between up, down, forward and backward (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:421).

The acquisition of literacy does not have a precise starting point, but should be conceptualised as a developmental continuum that starts early in life, long before children go to school, and continues throughout the preschool years (Machet, & Pretorius, 2003:39; WCED, 2011:57; Whitehurst, & Lonigan, 1998:848). Authors refer to the skills, knowledge and attitudes that are precursors for reading and writing as preliteracy skills (Machet, & Pretorius, 2003:39) or emergent literacy (WCED, 2011:57; Whitehurst, & Lonigan, 1998:848). Lukie, Skwarchuk, LeFevre and Sowinski (2014:257) found that children's early literacy and numeracy skills develop through meaningful interaction with parents, as well as the variety of new experiences that parents expose them to, including sports and play activities.

### **The role of parents in the development of early literacy skills**

According to field theory perspective, children cannot be studied separate from their family and wider environment with which they form an inseparable unity (Parlett, 1991:2; Yontef, 1993:3). Preliteracy skills develop in the social context of the family that either facilitates the development or fails to do so. Parents are children's first educators and when parents regularly read to their children, the children learn to read faster and progress better once they enter school (Dove, *et al.*, 2015:174; Ngwaru, 2012:34; Bracken & Fishel, 2008:45; Machet & Pretorius, 2003:40; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998:848). Children acquire a sense of what literacy is, through the literacy practices of their family or caregivers, in the context of the family and culture. In advantaged families, parents expose children to the type of literacy that they will encounter when they enter the school system. Parents read to their children and familiarize them with books. Children learn that books convey meaning and preliteracy skills such as holding a book in the correct position, turning the pages and reading from left to right are acquired. They also learn what the basic uses of literacy are through watching their parents reading newspapers or recipes, writing a shopping list or consulting a book (Machet & Pretorius, 2003:39). When parents regularly read to their children, the children quickly learn that the pictures and the words in the books are related to the story that the parents are reading to them. Later, they may start recognizing words even though they are not actually 'reading' them yet (Lara-Cinisomo, *et al.*, 2004:14). Farver, Xu, Eppe, and Lonigan (2006:207)

found that parents were instrumental in the development of preliteracy skills in their children by being pro-active in altering their home environment and encouraging their children to be involved in literacy-related activities at home. Edwards (2014:71) found evidence of emergent literacy skills in toddlers as young as three years old when their mothers provided a print rich home environment with an ample availability of books and other reading materials, and they regularly read to the toddlers. Apart from reading, other activities that promote emergent literacy skills include providing writing and drawing materials for scribbling and pretending to be writing, participating in conversations and identifying letters and words (Bowman, *et al.*, 2001:10), as well as singing, drawing, reciting verses, game playing and shared book reading (Dove, *et al.*, 2015:174). Lara-Cinisomo, *et al.*, (2004:3) include in their description of the home literacy environment the availability of children's books, reading to children, visits to the library, and the amount of television that children watch.

Important for this study, is that Bracken and Fishel, (2008:42, 45) found that there is a significant variation in the reading behaviour of families of low socio-economic status and when parents of low socio-economic status, provided a literature rich home for their preschoolers, these children developed the emergent literacy skills necessary for school readiness. Research suggests that parenting programmes that encourage less-educated parents to read to their children and expose them to books at an early age, are likely to have an important influence on school readiness (Lara-Cinisomo, *et al.*, 2004:21). Kaplan and Owens (2004:75) believe that even parents who regard themselves as educationally incompetent and for example cannot read or write, could take advantage of the situation by learning to read with their children. That will strengthen the bond between parent and child and confirm the importance and value of the learning experience that they share. According to the results of research conducted by Lau, Li and Rao (2011:107) in two communities in China, parents can make a significant difference to their preschoolers' literacy development and school readiness by carrying out different literacy and cognitive activities at home. Mchet's (2002:20) research in disadvantaged areas in South Africa pointed out that teaching parents to become more involved in their children's acquisition of literacy, plays an important role in encouraging the children to become lifelong readers and narrow the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged children.

### 2.3.2.3 Numeracy development

Mathematics is a cognitive skill that develops through concentration, problem solving, creativity, imagination, exploration, investigation, understanding cause and effect, language and concept formation. Emergent numeracy skills develop when preschoolers learn the concepts of size and quantity such as big, small, little, more, some and heavy (WCED, 2011:59).

## **The role of parents in the development of early numeracy skills**

Lara-Cinisomo, *et al.*, (2004: 14, 19) believe that children acquire their numeracy and literacy skills early in life. They are like sponges who soak up crucial skills through playing and everyday activities, especially if parents encourage them. These researchers also found that children's maths and reading skills were related to their mother's level of education as well as socio-economic status. Lukie, *et al.*, (2014:257) found that parents enhanced their children's numeracy development by interacting meaningfully with them and exposing them to new activities and experiences.

As mentioned, cognitive development is a domain of development that plays a determining role in children's school readiness. Under the heading cognitive development, language development as well as pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills and the role that parents play in the development of these areas were discussed. Although development takes place within the interaction between children and their environment, contemporary and previous research convincingly point to the crucial role that parents play in this area of school readiness. The importance of social and emotional school readiness of children and the vital role that parents play in the development of these domains will be discussed next.

### **2.3.3 Social and emotional development**

The focus of this literature study is about the role of parents in the development of children's school readiness skills and particularly their social and emotional skills. In this section a description of the components of social and emotional development, the role that social and emotional skills play in children's academic progress and the role that parents play, will be discussed. The researcher endeavoured to discuss social and emotional skills separately, but due to the interrelatedness of these domains, the researcher decided to discuss them together. In fact, all the domains of school readiness are interrelated (UNICEF, 2012:10; Van Zyl & Van Zyl, 2011:13).

#### *2.3.3.1 Description of social and emotional school readiness skills*

Social and emotional skills include non-cognitive skills such as adaptability, flexibility, comfort to ask questions, relationship with peers, respect for people and property, autonomy, and effective communication (Janus & Duku, 2007:376).

According to the WCED Training Manuel for Grade R educators (2012:114) learners need to master the following emotional skills prior to school entry:

- Separate easily from the parent;
- Accept adult authority;
- Submit to routine;
- Sit still and listen to the teacher for a reasonable length of time;

- Complete a simple task independently;
- The ability to submit to routine;
- Regulate own behaviour;
- The ability to work in a group.

The following social skills with regards to school readiness are added to the above list:

- A positive self-concept and self-confidence (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- Independence to care for themselves with regards to dressing, toilet routine and eating (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- Taking responsibility for their own safety by obeying rules (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- having the ability to build positive relationships with peers and adults (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:21 quoting Bulotsky-Shearer, Fantuzzo & McDermott, 2008; Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- The ability to assert themselves when necessary (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- Obeying and respecting rules and values (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:21 quoting Bulotsky-Shearer, *et al.*, 2008; Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- Understanding and respecting the needs of other people (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- To be able to take responsibility for completing age-appropriate tasks (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- To be excited and willing to attend school (Davin & Van Staden, 2005:4);
- The ability to cooperate with others (Farver, Xu, Eppe & Lonigan; 2006:207);
- To adhere to the social expectations of the learning situation (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:21 quoting Bulotsky-Shearer, *et al.*, 2008);
- To communicate effectively and follow instructions (Farver, *et al.*, 2006:207);
- The ability to seek help (Farver, *et al.*, 2006:207).

#### 2.3.3.2 Importance of social and emotional skills

Increasing numbers of learners enter the formal school system without the skills or abilities necessary to succeed, and ongoing research confirms the need to think about school readiness as a multi-faceted concept (Gilford, 2014:8; Hutter-Pishgahi, 2006:1; Raver, 2002:1). There is growing consensus among researchers and educators that social and emotional maturity must be considered as part of school readiness, rather than simply focusing on a limited set of academic skills (Ngwaru, 2012:27; Romano, Babchishin, Pagani, & Kohen, 2010:1005; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird & Kupzyk, 2010:125; Mackrain, Van Weelden & Marciniak, 2009:3; Janus & Duku, 2007:376; Pieterse, 2007:105; Denham, 2006:57; Hutter-Pishgahi, 2006:1; Wesley & Buysse, 2003:357; Raver, 2002:1). The importance of the social and emotional domains of development in the continued well-being and academic success of learners, has gained

prominence during the past decades. Because of competition between parents regarding the achievements of their children, parents typically emphasize the development of their children's physical and cognitive skills, but neglect the development of social and emotional skills. Learners who are emotionally ready for school are often more successful in life than learners with a high IQ who are not emotionally ready (Pieterse, 2007:105,111; Raver, 2002:4). Grade R learners who lack the ability to pay attention, execute instructions, get along with their classmates, and who cannot regulate negative emotions of anger and distress, do less well in school than other learners (Ngwaru, 2012:36; McClelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000:307).

According to Wesley and Buysse, (2003:357) academic skills and knowledge can still be taught in the classroom if children possess social-emotional skills such as interacting meaningfully with one another and with adults, showing appropriate independence and following simple rules and directions. Educators regard enthusiasm for learning and the ability to regulate emotions and behaviour as indicators of children who are teachable and ready to learn (Denham, 2006: 57). Romano, *et al.* (2010:1005) found in their data analysis of a longitudinal study of 1,521 Canadian children that the children's socio-emotional skills in kindergarten (the US equivalent to Grade R), including their interpersonal skills, their ability to focus and pay attention, staying seated and not be aggressive or disruptive, exerted an important influence on their later academic progress, their relationship with their educators, their self-confidence and their eagerness to learn. Ngwaru (2012:27) states that children's early emotional and social development impact directly on their early literacy development and sustained school attendance and progress. McClelland, *et al.* (2000:326) found that children with poor work-related social skills, performed significantly worse on all academic levels, compared to children in the overall sample at the fall of kindergarten (the US equivalent to Grade R) and at the end of second grade. Over the last two decades, several studies have clearly indicated that children's emotional and social skills are linked to their early academic performance (Romano, *et al.*, 2010:1005; Fantuzzo, Sekino, & Cohen, 2004:333; Wentzel & Asher, 1995:755).

In the light of the profound influence that parents have on all the domains of their children's development, some theoretical viewpoints will be considered before continuing with the components of social and emotional school readiness. Although this study focuses on Grade R learners, earlier development needs to be taken into consideration, because there is increasing evidence that human development is a layered process where general functioning and task completion in one developmental stage has very real implications for the whole developmental trajectory of a human being. Especially in the light of scientific research, confirming that the process of establishing sound brain development starts immediately after birth (Centre on the Developing Child, 2012), infant development needs to be taken into consideration.

A description of prominent theories of child development that have bearing on this study will be discussed, followed by a detailed discussion of the social and emotional development of children as components of school readiness.

### *2.3.3.3 Developmental theories impacting on the development of social and emotional school readiness skills*

To position child development within a theoretical framework, the developmental theories of prominent clinicians that are accepted as authoritative by prominent authors, (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:306; Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:44) will be discussed next.

#### *Erik Erikson's theory of psychosocial development*

Erik Erikson described eight stages according to which psychosocial development takes place, covering the entire human lifespan. He believed that development takes place through overcoming a crisis in each stage. Each crisis arises when biological development has to be reconciled with the social demands of the environment. If the crisis is not resolved successfully, it could impact negatively on the person's overall development and resolution of the next crisis, because one stage builds onto the next (Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:44). The psychosocial development of Grade R learners spans three stages, namely:

*Trust vs mistrust (0-18 months):* Babies are helpless and need their caregivers to meet their needs. They need to learn to trust others. If caregivers are inconsistent or abusive, children learn that people cannot be trusted and that the world is an unsafe place. The parent or primary caregiver plays a key role in this process (Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:45).

*Autonomy vs shame and doubt (18 months - 3 years):* Children become more autonomous, they start to care for themselves and they want to act freely and independently. Failure to become independent, leads to self-doubt and feelings of shame. Parents play a key role in this process (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:45).

*Initiative versus guilt (3-6 years):* Children experience conflicting feelings about the self. They have boundless energy, they want to explore and have a growing sense of purpose which spurs them on to tackle activities and responsibilities. When these activities conflict with social expectations, it leads to feelings of guilt. They need to feel competent and receive approval to develop purpose and the motivation to pursue goals without being inhibited by guilt or fear of disapproval (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:306; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:45). When parents provide children with ample opportunities to do things on their own, but with good guidance and healthy limits, children can achieve a balance between striving for success without overdoing it, and constantly trying to slow off (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:310).

At the end of the Grade R year, when learners enter the formal school system, they move into the start of the following phase:

*Industry versus inferiority (6-12 years):* This phase is a major determinant of self-esteem when children need to master important social and academic competencies. They start to compare themselves to their peers. They need to feel industrious and receive approval from the people around them. If they succeed, they feel self-assured, but if they fail, feelings of inferiority and inadequacy may cause them to retreat to the safety of the family (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:395). Although Martorell, *et al.*, (2014:395) state that parents strongly influence their children's beliefs about their competence, Shaffer and Kipp (2014:45) comment that educators and peers play an important role in this phase.

Erikson's theory of psychosocial development thus suggests that a firm foundation should be laid during the first six years for Grade R learners, to be able to enter into trusting relationships, to act autonomously, to have a sense of purpose and to enjoy hard work and take initiative. In all four phases parents play a key role through supportive, nurturing parenting and setting appropriate boundaries, while encouraging their children to explore and take initiative. The family should clearly serve as a safe haven from where Grade R learners set out to enter the school system and deal with the demands and possible conflict and adversity of the outside world, and where they can return to replenish their inner resources.

#### *Attachment theory*

The other theory of human development indicating the vital role that parents play in their children's development is attachment theory. Attachment theory was first described by Bowlby (1969:246) and expanded upon by Ainsworth (1985:771). The work of these two clinicians is regarded today as the benchmark for parent-child-relationships (Dowling, 2014:36; Kraemer, 2011:2; Mesman, Van IJzendoorn, & Bakermans-Kranenburg, 2012:239; Davies, 2011:44; Eshel, *et al.* 2006:992; Thompson, 2000:145). Ainsworth (1985:773) described secure versus insecure attachments as observed during her *Strange Situation* research of the interaction between parents and infants. Her observations indicated that infants in a secure attachment cried less, complied more with adult commands, and displayed greater self-reliance later on, as compared to infants in insecure attachments. Infants in insecure attachments also displayed more anger than others. Ainsworth (1985:773) concluded that the regularity with which parents respond to their babies' needs and interact with the babies, creates expectations of this relationship within the babies. These expectations later form 'working models' or representational models in the baby's world, his relationships and eventually of himself. The influence of attachment on children's future relationships, brings to the fore the importance of the proximal processes in their microsystem

while they are developing, and the influence of the chronosystem as described by Bronfenbrenner when parenting skills are being assessed (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796, Rosa & Tudge, 2013:254). Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development will be dealt with later in this chapter. Clearly, the parent's role in the child's school readiness starts very early in the relationship, when the basic attachment is formed.

Sensitive and responsive caregiving by the parents is regarded by many researchers as the foundation of learning and development in all spheres of the child's life (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011 (video); Eshel, 2006:991; WHO, 2004:1; Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001:2). A baby is born keen to interact and he seeks eye contact with the parent in order to communicate. The parent's task is to respond to these efforts with expressions of love and encouragement, for the baby to experience that his efforts are valued. (Bowlby, 1969:264; Dowling, 2014:39). Responsiveness is conceptualised as the mother's correct observation and interpretation of her infant's cues and her swift and appropriate response to meet the infant's needs (Eshel, *et.al.* 2006:991). The Centre on the Developing Child (2011, n.p.) and the National Scientific Council on the Developing child (2004:1) refer to the 'serve and return' interaction or contingent reciprocity between parent and infant, as a determining factor in the formation of neural connections in the infant's brain, that form the foundation of all later learning, behaviour and well-being. According to Richter (2004:2) loving and responsive care provides the child with a positive reflection of himself and of the world. His early experience within the parent-child attachment, creates with him certain expectations of future events and relationships. A child who is treated with love and care, feels special and expects others to treat him as someone deserving of care and attention. Children's capacity to love is developed through the attentive care that they have been given with love. An unresponsive mother causes in her child chronic despair and stress hormones that flood the brain (Kraemer, 2011:2).

### *Social learning theory of Albert Bandura*

The social learning theory deals with learning in a social context and is included here to highlight the importance of parental modelling in the development of social and emotional school readiness skills. This theory was formulated by psychologist Albert Bandura. He believed that, apart from elementary reflexes, children are not born with a range of behaviours. These behaviours are learned either through experience or through direct observation. Although genetics and physiological factors play a contributing role, experiences lead to new patterns of behaviour. To cite an example, Bandura describes the process of language acquisition as the inborn ability of a small child to utter a few rudimentary sounds, which are then later organised into patterns of speech (Bandura, 1977:16). Regarding experience, children will learn from the consequences of their own actions, whether their behaviour is rewarding and appropriate. In the case of pleasant consequences, the behaviour will be repeated and the person learns to anticipate the

consequences. In the case of negative consequences, the behaviour is discarded. Through past experience, children form symbolic representations that they can apply in the present, to ensure beneficial outcomes and to avert disastrous ones (Bandura, 1977:18).

The other form of learning that Bandura described was through modelling. He firmly believed that many forms of behaviour are learned through observing other people performing certain actions. This prevents people from making unnecessary errors (Bandura, 1977:22). For learning to take place, four processes need to be present:

*Attentional processes:* These processes determine what is observed. A number of factors play a role here, including the relationship between the child and the model. Associational patterns are of importance here. When the model is highly esteemed by the child, the model and child are in a close association and the functional value of the behaviour is high. The child will observe the action in much more detail than when there is no connection and no attached value to the action (Bandura, 1977:24-29).

*Retention processes:* Actions cannot be learned if not retained in some form. From observing a model enacting certain behaviour, a child forms memories in the form of mental images, as well as verbal coding. In the case of repeated observations of an action, these memories can be recalled and re-enacted in different circumstances and in the absence of the original model.

*Motor reproduction processes:* In the third component, the child converts the mental representation into action. Initially this is a cognitive process. The child may initially commit errors and there may be a discrepancy between the observed behaviour and the child's efforts. However, through patient coaching and practice, a closer approximation may be achieved.

*Motivational processes:* Children do not repeat all the behaviour that they observe. There needs to be an observed value or beneficial consequence to the observed action, for it to be repeated.

Regarding anti-social behaviour, Bandura states that vicarious reinforcement or punishment determines the probability of the behaviour to be repeated. When acts of aggression are followed by punishment, it acts as a deterrent for the observer. When an aggressor is consistently rewarded or when there are no adverse consequences, the probability of the observer repeating the aggressive behaviour, increases.

#### *Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory of development*

A child's development is shaped by a complex variety of influences that emerge from multiple environments. Bronfenbrenner was one of the earlier clinicians who drew attention to the important

influence of the environment on children's development, with his ecological model of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3). According to this model, development is the product of proximal processes consisting of constant and ongoing reciprocal interactions between an individual and the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem and chronosystem in which he grows up. Whereas Bronfenbrenner placed emphasis on the environment in his earlier ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3), his later bioecological model placed more prominence on the role of the developing individual. He described child development as a function of the interactions (*Process*) between the unique characteristics of the developing child (*Person*), the immediate and more distant environments (*Context*) and the historical period (*Time*) in which the proximal processes take place (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:796, Rosa & Tudge, 2013:254). In line with Bronfenbrenner's theory, UNICEF's policy document on school readiness (2012:6) states that the school readiness of Grade R learners is the product of the interaction between the child and a variety of environmental and cultural experiences that maximize the development outcomes for children.

Although the above theories highlight different aspects of child development, the importance of parents as primary role players in their children's immediate environment during the years of early development is evident. The importance of various components of social and emotional school readiness and the role that parents play in this regard will be discussed next.

#### *2.3.3.4 Components of social and emotional school readiness*

##### *Self-regulation*

Self-regulation is a skill which is crucial for a child's early classroom success (Morrison, Ponitz & McClelland, n.d.). Self-regulation is the foundation of socialization and is a broad term that includes skills on several domains of human functioning, including biological, attentional, emotional, behavioural and cognitive regulation (Calkins & Williford, 2009:176; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:240). Kopp (2002:10) describes self-regulation as a balancing of self-defined needs with family and societal norms and values. For young children this means to be able to comply with parental rules and expectations, including delaying behaviour when necessary (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:240).

##### *Emotion regulation*

Emotional readiness at school entry implies that learners should be able to deal with, regulate, and appropriately express their own emotions, as well as respond appropriately to the feelings of others (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:21; Barbarin, *et al.*, 2008:674; Janus, & Duku, 2007:376). Pieterse (2007:111) adds to this list the ability to postpone the satisfying of their emotional needs by waiting their turn, showing perseverance in completing tasks and the ability to take responsibility. According to Van Zyl and Van Zyl (2011:13) adequate emotional maturity provides the child with the inner discipline to want to learn, and this cannot be separated from the other domains of

school readiness. Learners who are emotionally competent are not impulsive, they possess an inner self-control, they present with prosocial behaviour and they can channel their emotions into self-improvement activities (Strydom, 2011:111). Emotion regulation forms the foundation of social development, and the success with which children deal with their own emotions, determines their success in forming positive relationships with peers (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:208). According to Kopp (2002:10) emotion regulation (ER) refers to modulating the intensity of emotional responses such as anger, fear, pleasure and sadness. Effective emotion regulation means that a child's emotional response is appropriate to a situation, enhances rather than jeopardizes the child's physical well-being, and that the child exercises control over subsequent social and cognitive activities. Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, Kehoe, Efron and Prior (2013:248) distinguish between *emotional expressivity*, denoting how children experience and express emotions, *emotion regulation*, signifying children's ability to control and modify their emotions to comply with cultural and situational demands, and *emotion knowledge*, which entails understanding one's own emotions and that of others, as well as the ability to talk about emotions.

Regarding the impact of emotion regulation on school readiness, Graziano, Reavis, Keane and Calkins (2007:n.p.) found that it was linked to academic success and productivity, as mirrored in children's math and early literacy progress. These researchers' findings point to the probability that children who cannot regulate their emotions, have trouble learning, are less productive, and less accurate when completing assignments. Furthermore, these researchers suggest that insufficient emotional readiness may have a direct negative influence on learning by damaging learners' ability to pay attention, and indirectly by causing disruptive behaviour, either of which will impact negatively on learners' school progress. Emotional development also impacts on children's social development in that it conveys important social information to the onlookers. When a child expresses an emotion, it has an impact on the other children who witness that expression. An angry expression could be interpreted as a sign to retreat or fight back (Denham, Mason, Caverly, Schmidt, Hackney, Caswell & DeMulder, 2001:290). In the South African context Strydom (2011:110) mentions that, considering the high prevalence of domestic and school violence, it is evident that many learners have not reached the level of emotional maturity that they need, to deal with demands on a personal, school and societal level. This brings home the urgency for South African learners to be coached to deal with their emotions in a more constructive way.

### **The role of parents in the development of emotion regulation**

Emotion regulation is a developmental task of all children, because life unavoidably includes challenges that they need to deal with in a constructive way (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:208). Besides physical care, parents have the fundamentally important task of helping their children deal with their feelings (Ngwaru, 2012:36; Pieterse, 2007:112; Neethling, Rutherford, & Schoeman, 2005: 38; Kopp, 2002:10; Raver, 2002:8; Kraemer, 1997:8). Research with parents and preschoolers in

Rumania by Turculet and Tulbure (2014:377) found that parents had a profound and lasting influence on their children's emotional development and that the parents' own emotional competence determined their children's emotional competence. In this regard parents play a crucial role. Children experience intense emotions, both positive and negative. While they are very young, they cannot yet make sense of their own feelings and they experience intense feelings when they are alone and in distress. The closeness of an attachment figure provides emotional protection for such an infant.

Consistent, loving parenting encourages the development of the baby's prefrontal cortex, which enhances the developing of emotional and social skills such as impulse control, paying attention and showing empathy to others (Gerhardt, 2009, n.p.). When children are young, their emotions are managed by their parents, but as they grow older, they need to reach autonomy in this area to achieve a state of well-being (Ngwaru, 2012:36; Smith, *et al.*, 2011:208; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:435). Caring, responsive parents who quickly respond to their babies' distress or restlessness by soothing, rocking or feeding the babies, encourages the babies' brain to establish maximum levels of bio-chemicals, including oxytocin and serotonin in the babies' bodies, causing the babies to return to a state of relaxation and contentment. This lays the foundation for the babies to develop their own effective self-soothing system and a balanced way in which to deal with stress, which forms the foundation for good self-regulation and genuine independence later in life (Davies, 2011:9; Goleman, (introduction) *In* Lantieri, 2008:2). As infants repeatedly experience that their parents regulate their emotions for them, the neural pathway of how to do it themselves, develops (Gerhardt, 2009, n.p.). Teaching children to name their feelings and talk through it, provides them with a powerful social tool (Raver, 2002:5). Good emotion regulation helps children feel competent in controlling distress and negative emotions (Davies, 2011:9). During their second and third year, the development of emotion regulation depends on toddlers' understanding of their own and of others' emotional state, as well as their ability to reason about emotions (Kopp, 2002:10). When children experience that their parents can deal with strong emotions such as rage and hatred without resorting to violence, they learn that they can do the same. In this way they also learn to understand other people's emotions (Kraemer, 1997:8). Parents can also teach young children who can talk about their feelings, techniques such as distraction or reinterpreting the cause of their distress in order to deal constructively with their feelings (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:435).

When children are older, parents should teach them that they need to take responsibility for their own emotions and that they cannot blame others for how they feel. In the first place parents achieve this by appropriately expressing and verbalizing their own feelings and by demonstrating respect for the feelings of others, including that of the child (Neethling, *et al.*, 2005:41). Parents should model appropriate expression of emotions and create an environment that encourages its

development (Denham, Zinsser & Bailey, 2011:3). For the purpose of this study it is important that the above suggestions to parents for teaching children their children emotion regulation, should be incorporated into the parenting programme.

In South Africa many learners come from families where they are deprived of parental love and acceptance and who are not afforded the opportunity to express their emotions in a normal, healthy way. The result is that there are many learners in South African schools who have deep emotional pain, who do not know how to access help and whose pent-up emotions may eventually erupt into socially damaging behaviours (Strydom, 2011:111). Still in the South African context, Bruwer, *et al.* (2014:26) found in their research on school readiness of Grade 1 learners, that learners who were not emotionally ready, could not work independently and lacked the emotional maturity to take care of their belongings. These learners felt helpless and cried easily, which was a clear indication of their lack of emotional readiness to cope with the demands of the classroom. They also had difficulty adhering to the social demands of the teaching situation, such as sitting still and paying attention, with the result that they seemed disobedient and disruptive. They were unable to work in groups, since they constantly fought with one another.

Not all research confirms the important role that parents play in social and emotional school readiness. McWayne, Owsianik, Green and Fantuzzo (2008:186) found no correlation between the parenting behaviours of low-income African American parents in the USA and the social and emotional development of their kindergarten (the US equivalent to Grade R) children. Their own results as well as their review of other research lead them to question the validity of applying the traditional constructs of parenting on marginalized groups of people such as low-income African Americans.

### *Behaviour regulation*

Behavioural regulation includes paying attention, working memory, and inhibiting inappropriate behaviour. According to McClelland, Cameron, Connor, Farris, Jewkes, and Morrison (2007:949) these three cognitive processes form the foundation of positive classroom behaviour and they enable the child to remember and follow a teacher's instructions without being distracted. Children who are unable to inhibit undesirable behaviours, such as talking out of turn or not completing assignments, are unable to function successfully in the classroom. Working memory denotes the following functions: the ability to work on two separate tasks and to switch one's attention from the one to the other, the ability to use retrieval strategies, the ability to attend to one stimulus and shut out other interfering stimulus, and the ability to retain and use information in long-term memory (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:289).

## **The role of parents in the development of behaviour regulation**

During the child's first year, when brain development is most rapid, the attachment relationship with the parent is the infant's most important environment and it exerts a powerful influence on the development of brain systems. Intimate parent-child interactions, emotional regulation and playful exchanges contribute to optimal brain development and gradually lead to the development of self-regulation (Davies, 2011:44). Baker's (2013:184) study of relevant literature, established that parents are the primary socializing agents of their children and that early parent-child literacy activities could improve children's capacity to focus and pay attention. Baker's (2013:194) own research found that parents' literacy activities with their children, including shared book reading, developed these children's social skills on different levels, including improved attentional skills and less behaviour problems. Through sensitive parenting and the warm, supportive bond between parent and child, parents socialize with their children through daily input regarding family and societal norms and values and through the example that they set (Kopp, 2002:10, Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:241). Mothers who provide good cognitive and emotional support to their children when they are facing a challenging task at home, while allowing them to exercise a measure of autonomy, are teaching them to apply focused attention and effort on a task, to use self-talk in problem solving and ultimately to adhere to classroom rules (Calkins & Williford, 2009:186). The more children can learn to approach difficult situations with the parents' support and encouragement, the more they will develop the skills necessary to deal with life challenges (Power, 2004:307).

Duncombe, Havighurst, Holland & Frankling (2012:727-729) researched the correlation between several parenting behaviours and children's emotion regulation and disruptive behaviour, with the assumption that emotion regulation has a direct bearing on children's behaviour. The results confirmed a large body of earlier research that parents exert a direct, important influence on their children's emotion regulation and behaviour regulation, with the following indications:

- Emotion coaching (as opposed to emotion dismissing) promoted emotion regulation, which lead to a reduction in disruptive behaviour (Duncombe, *et al.*, 2012:727);
- Inconsistent and harsh discipline affected both emotion and behaviour regulation of children negatively, with corporal punishment contributing the most (Duncombe, *et al.*, 2012:727);
- Parents who predominantly expressed positive emotions (instead of negative emotions such as being involved in arguments with family members) and were supportive of their children's emotions, decreased the probability that their children would display disruptive behaviours (Duncombe, *et al.*, 2012:728).

A subsequent study by Havighurst, Wilson, Harley, Kehoe, Efron and Prior (2013:260) on the effect of the TIK ('Tune into Kids') parenting programme, also indicated that children's emotion regulation is influenced by their parents' modelling of emotion expression.

Mathis and Bierman (2015:614) studied the role of directive-critical parenting and parenting stress on the development of emotion regulation and attentional control in the school readiness of children. Both these parenting behaviours showed a correlation with emotion regulation, while only directive-critical parenting was associated with attention control. A surprising finding was that warm, supportive parenting showed no association with these components of school readiness.

Another component linked to social and emotional school readiness is approaches to learning, which will be discussed next.

### *Approaches to learning*

A report by the US Administration for Learners and Families (Horm, Norris, Perry, Chazan-Cohen & Halle, 2016:5) describes learners' approaches to learning as a combination of social and cognitive skills. The interest and persistence with which learners approach learning activities, are social components, as well as the executive functioning of learners. Executive functioning encompassed many cognitive skills, including the capacity to delay gratification, direct attention at specific goals, think before reacting, and memory. These capacities enable learners to learn, explore and be successful on several academic levels and in social relationships.

Although approaches to learning is dealt with under emotional development in this study, it is regarded by some authors as a domain of school readiness sufficiently important that it warrants separate discussion (Horm, *et al.*, 2016:5; Barbu, Yaden, Levine-Donnerstein & Marx, 2015:1; UNICEF, 2012:10; Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle & Calkins, 2006:433). Though most learners have a natural interest and curiosity in learning, there are vast differences in the self-confidence, motivation and enthusiasm with which they approach a new learning situation (Thompson & Goodman, 2009:154). The extent to which learners engage in activities in the classroom, plays a significant role in their academic success, whereas a decline in engagement, leads to poor outcomes in the long run. Fantuzzo, Perry and McDermott (2004:213) and Hair, *et al.* (2006:433) include in approaches to learning a learner's curiosity and motivation to learn, perseverance, the ability to focus on relevant stimuli, the way in which a learner approaches a task and solves problems, as well as interaction with peers and adults. Ziv (2013:10) found a direct link between preschoolers' social information processing ability (their ability to correctly judge social encounters) and their approaches to learning, where approaches to learning was measured by their motivation and ability to focus and sustain attention.

Learners who start their school career with high motivation, tend to fare increasingly better, but those who start with poor motivation, tend to become more disengaged over time. Although approaches to learning are related to temperament, maternal behaviours play a role in developing

these traits (Horn, *et al.*, 2016:5). Alexander, Entwistle and Dauber (1993:813) found that certain components of engagement in the classroom, namely attention span/restlessness and interest/participation, played a pivotal role in how the learners progressed academically, which then had an influence on their future classroom engagement up to the fourth grade, positively or negatively.

### **The role of parents in approaches to learning**

Skinner, Furrer, Marchant and Kindermann (2008:777) concluded that feelings of autonomy, competence and a secure relationship with the teacher, contributed to learners' engagement in school work, whereas a lack of these lead to diminished enjoyment and motivation in learners. In an earlier study by Furrer and Skinner (2003:158) it was established that learners' positive emotional and behavioural relatedness in class was connected to their feeling of relatedness to parents, peers and educators, with parents playing the most significant role. Relatedness to parents acted as a motivational force, by possibly adding to learners' readiness to become engaged in classroom activities. Learners who felt rejected or ignored by, or alienated from their parents, educators and peers, became frustrated or bored, which negatively influenced their academic performance, leading to further estrangement. Although approaches to learning are related to temperament, maternal behaviours play a role in developing these traits (Horn, *et al.*, 2016:5).

The importance of the parental role in approaches to learning was further illustrated in a longitudinal study of the influence of the emotional climate in families on children's school outcomes by Bodovski and Youn (2010:593), who found that maternal depression during Kindergarten (the US equivalent to Grade R) contributed to low approaches to learning in Grade 5. Thompson and Goodman (2009:154) indicate that parents (and educators) who emphasize their children's intrinsic abilities and successful efforts, encourage the development of a positive learning orientation. Fantuzzo, McWayne and Perry (2004:474) found that, when parents engaged in home based activities with their children and provided learning opportunities for them, it improved their motivation and curiosity to learn, their perseverance in task completion and their relationship with peers. This finding is supported by Baker and Rimm-Kaufman (2014:730) who found that, when mothers of African American children regularly stimulated their children with home learning activities, their children fared better in several social-emotional domains, including their approaches to learning. Such an engagement by parents and children in home based activities is an important aspect to consider when developing a parenting skills programme. In line with the two mentioned studies, Baker, Cameron, Rimm-Kaufman and Grissmer (2012:847) found that African American boys' teacher-reported approaches to learning (attentiveness, task persistence, eagerness to learn, flexibility, and organization) were associated with regular parent-child reading and provision of ample reading materials.

Bruwer, *et al.* (2014:26), researched the school readiness of two Grade 1 classes with learners who are mostly from rural areas in South Africa. The researchers found that learners who were not school ready, lacked the independence, concentration and persistence to complete tasks. They could not benefit from the learning activities in the classroom, which lead to repeated failure, discouragement and poor self-image, as observed by their educators.

The conclusion from the above studies, as well as from this small scale local study, is that low approaches to learning lead to poor academic outcomes for learners and that parents have a pivotal role to play in this important domain of development. Regarding advice on how parents can motivate their children, Strydom (2011:144) has practical advice. This author describes motivation as an 'energizer of behaviour' and she suggests two important driving forces of motivation:

- Having a dream or a vision: Children need to have a vision of where they want to end up in life and they need to see every day as a small step in that direction;
- Resilience: To have the ability to bounce back when setbacks, disappointments or adversity is encountered.

The importance of emotion and behaviour regulation as well as high approaches to learning as components of school readiness are highlighted in literature. From the above it is clear that many researchers believe that parents play a key role in the development of self-regulation in children, through the secure attachment that they forge with their children, through responsive and supportive parenting and later through modelling and guiding their children to take responsibility for their own emotions. Continuous involvement with their children in home based activities also contributes to high approaches to learning.

#### *Relationship skills and prosocial behaviour*

Learning takes place within a social setting and children need to get along with adults and with peers to be school ready. They need the ability to enter into relationships with their educators and with peers, to work together in a team, to assert themselves and to respect and understand the rights of others (Denham, Bassett, Mincic, Kalb, Way, Wyatt & Segal, 2012:179).

According to Kennedy (2013:18) peer-related social competence included the ability of preschoolers to achieve social goals and to interact and fit in with peers. Prosocial behaviour is an aspect of social development and it includes any voluntary action intended to support or benefit other people (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:326; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:578). The term refers to the degree to which children can share, help, co-operate, comfort or empathise with others, (Kakavoulis, 1998:346) as well as the ability to control aggression (Davies, 2011:256). Prosocial behaviour is a character trait of high value that seems to emerge from early childhood. There are indications in

literature that prosocial behaviour starts as early as 12 months in infants and that this behaviour is not prompted by parents or done to get attention or any form of gain (Kakavoulis, 1998:343).

#### *The importance of peer relationships*

Fantuzzo, Sekino and Cohen (2004:333) concluded that positive peer interactions were positively linked to cognitive and social competence, improved movement/coordination abilities at the end of the reception year (the US equivalent to Grade R), as well as positive early literacy and numeracy results. In line with the previous author, Horm, Norris, Perry, Chazan-Cohen and Halle (2016:5) state that getting along with peers and building friendships are foundational to being ready for kindergarten and beyond. Also, Furrer and Skinner (2003:158) found that positive peer relationships played a role in learners' readiness to engage in classroom activities. According to Davies (2011:260) friendships add to children's resilience and help them to deal with the stressful transition to school and other challenges. Dowling (2014:34) says that the acquisition of social skills must be a priority, because without social relationships children cannot survive. This author describes the move from home to the reception year as probably the child's most challenging move in his school career, if he did not attend a nursery school. Therefore, every child needs the comfort and companionship of a friend in times of transition such as entering school for the first time. The literature cited here, provides convincing evidence of the importance of peer interaction leading to social development and ultimately playing a significant role in school readiness.

On the other hand, poor peer interaction and disruptive peer play have been associated with poor behavioural and emotional adjustment outcomes (Furrer & Skinner, 2003:158; Fantuzzo, *et al.*, 2004:332). Buhs, Ladd and Herald (2006:10) found that social withdrawal or aggression in kindergarten leads to early peer rejection. This caused a decline in classroom participation and academic progress and it later lead to school avoidance. Furthermore, early peer rejection was carried over from one year to the other. These findings accentuate the importance that Grade R learners enter school with the necessary social skills to build positive peer relationships. A literature review by Parker and Asher (1987:357) suggested that children with poor peer relationships are at risk for difficulties later in life, especially for the risk of dropping out of school, criminal behaviour, as well as aggressiveness and low social acceptance.

The social development of the preschooler includes moving from an egocentric toddler to a more socially skilled and aware child who learns to take the perspectives of others into account. They need to learn social skills, prosocial behaviour and values, and how to build friendships and get along with peers (Davies, 2011:256). According to the WCED's Training Manual for Grade R Educators (2011:17) typical Grade R learners love to play with friends, can play in a group and start to share and take turns. They often have a best friend. They insist on fair play and have a

concept of rules. They accept the uniqueness of self and others. They enjoy jokes and fantasy activities. They are dependent on the approval of adults and accept and respect authority.

### **The role of parents in the development of relationship building skills**

Dowling (2014:36) and Scrimgeour, Blandon, Stifter and Buss (2013:506) established through studies that the first six or seven years are crucial for children to develop social skill, in other words, while children are still predominantly under the influence of their parents. With regards to children's ability to form relationships, a secure attachment with a parent underpins all subsequent relationships, and allows children to form trusting relationships with adults and other children in the wider community, including the school community, when they enter the formal school system. The secure attachment with the parent creates within the child a preparedness to form relationships with other family members and then with other adults and children (Dowling, 2014:37; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:232; Kraemer, 2011:2). Siblings also provide precious opportunity to learn a variety of social skills and experience relationship dynamics, including rivalry, jealousy and loyalty (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:244).

There is ample evidence in literature that parents play an important role in the development of prosocial behaviour in their children. Research suggests that parent-child interaction during the early years plays a key role in motivating children to act in a prosocial way towards others (Farrant, Devine, Murray, Maybery & Fletcher, 2012:183; Nantel-Vivier, Pihl, Sylvana Coté & Tremblay, 2014:1141). Children learn prosocial behaviour and the values attached to it from the way that their parents model such behaviour within a caring, supportive relationship and within healthy boundaries (Davies, 2011:256). The research results of Brownell, Svetlova, Anderson, Nichols and Drummond (2013:n.p.) suggest that toddlers whose mothers discussed and explained the emotional states of others while reading story books to them, and encouraged the toddlers to reflect on other's emotions, displayed more prosocial behaviour than other toddlers. Scrimgeour, *et al.* (2013:509) studied the effect of co-operation between parents in two parent families on prosocial behaviour and found that children were more prosocial when their parents engaged in more co-operating behaviours with each other. High levels of co-parenting cooperation may provide children with a positive model of interpersonal interaction. King, McDougall, DeWit, Hong, Miller, Offord, Meyer and LaPorta (2005:314) also found in their longitudinal study of approximately 10 000 Canadian children before kindergarten (the USA's equivalent of Grade R) and again in Grade 6, indications that one of the pathways to prosocial behaviour and less aggressive behaviour in children lay in family functioning. Their findings suggest that the family plays an important role in providing children with a variety of experiences through which they can develop self-regulatory skills to achieve behavioural control. Regarding family functioning, the researchers included problem-solving, communication and parents' emotional warmth, and emotional involvement with their children (King, *et al.*, 2005:318, 336).

Nantel-Vivier, *et al.* (2014:1141) found in their study about the relationship between prosocial behaviour and aggression, anxiety and depression, that there is a link between positive parenting and the development of prosocial behaviour in children and an inverse association between maternal depression or hostile parenting and prosocial behaviour. Their findings also indicated that low family income leads to lower prosocial behaviour and an increase in aggression in children. Gender was found to be a variable as with being a boy, associated with lower prosocial behaviour. Waller, Gardner, Hyde, Shaw, Dishion and Wilson (2012:951) found in a sample of 879 children of two to four years old, that early harsh parenting was linked to deceitful-calling behaviour (deceitfulness and lack of guilt/lack of empathy for others) in the toddlers, and that parental report of this behaviour predicted later deceitful-calling behaviour. The researchers postulate that the deceitful-calling behaviour might fuel increasing harsher and more inconsistent parenting, resulting in a cycle of mutual negative reinforcement where parent and child continuously resort to coercive interactions.

In their review of studies on how children develop prosocial behaviour, Smith, *et al.* (2011:304) found that the parent-child attachment as well as parents' sensitivity towards their children, and their encouragement of their children to reflect on the influence that their behaviour has on others, play a role in the way that children learn to demonstrate prosocial behaviour towards others. Smith, *et al.* (2011:305) quote Dunn (2006) who found, after extensive studies, that punishment for failing to act in a prosocial way, which created feelings of guilt, did not encourage children to internalise their parents' values and develop prosocial behaviour.

When children come from a family where attachments are insecure and they do not have an internal working model of relationships where there is the experience of being helped, their capacity to reach out with empathy and trust to others may be impaired (Smith, *et al.* 2011:295). A child who is used to being neglected, usually does not expect love and kindness from others and frequently behaves aggressively and defensively towards others (Richter, 2004:2). This diminishes the possibility that such a child can enter into a positive, caring relationship with another adult where the effect of the deficient parent-child relationship could be countered. Because of the importance of a child's relationship with an adult caregiver (teacher) when he separates from the parent to enter school (Dowling, 2014:39), the inability to enter into such a relationship could present problems for the Grade R learner. If children expect adults to be uncaring, they may stop seeking assistance and comfort from adults, even though some adults in their environment would respond warmly (WHO, 2004:37). This in turn could jeopardize the child's level of engagement with classroom activities. Sheridan, *et al.* (2010:147) found that, when parent engagement (supportive and sensitive parenting, encouraged autonomy and participation in learning) increased through programme intervention, the children displayed benefits in several socio-emotional skills,

including improved levels of attachment behaviour, heightened display of initiative and assertiveness, and a reduction in anxiety/withdrawal.

Hoghghi (2004:7) talks about 'social care', denoting parents' activities to ensure that their children are not isolated from peers and significant adults. Social relationships have a profound effect on the development of children's self-image and their emotional states. Positive social care means to help children to become well integrated at home and school and accept increasing responsibility for self-management. Positive interactions with others and success in completing tasks], offers children the opportunity to learn to recognise the worth of others and enhance their own development.

The opposite of prosocial behaviour is aggression, which also emerges early in life. Already in 1998, Kakavoulis (1998:343) stated that, since aggression is an enduring characteristic over the life span, it is ascribed by some authors to innate factors such as hormone levels or temperament. However, another school of thought is that aggression develops through environmental influences of social learning principles such as reinforcement, punishment and observational learning. The likelihood that children will become aggressive themselves when growing up in families experiencing ongoing patterns of coercion, family members controlling each other with various forms of aggression, or children who watch television with violent content, is great. This view corresponds with that of Albert Bandura's social learning theory as described earlier in this chapter. In the acclaimed Bobo doll experiment of Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961:580) and also cited by Dowling (2014:36), it was found that, when children observed modelling of physical and verbal aggression, their levels of aggression increased and they could display detailed imitations of the observed aggression, in contrast with children who were not exposed to such aggression and who did not display aggression in the play situation. If modelling of aggression by a neutral model in a research experiment could exercise such a direct influence, one can only postulate the influence that aggression of parents might have if children are emotionally linked to them.

### *Moral development*

According to the Training Manual for Grade R Educators of the WCECD (2011:21) the moral development of a Grade R learner should include respect for others and non-living things. The typical Grade R learner should be able to demand fairness, cooperate, accept personal responsibility and acknowledge his rights. He should value his own identity while acknowledging diversity of culture and religion.

Moral development is part of socialization and is the process of learning what is right and what is wrong. The first stage in developing morality, is becoming aware of rules. Continuous guidance from parents and educators makes children aware of rules. Once children realise that rules are

based on values, they start to realise what contribution their behaviour makes to their own welfare, to those of others and to the environment (Scobey, 2015:42; Thompson & Twibell, 2009:214). Young children learn that some behaviours are 'bad' and have negative consequences. Other behaviours are 'good', because they have pleasant consequences.

Piaget theorised that children between four and five years and younger did not understand rules. At about four to five years old, children understand rules, but they believe these rules come from a higher power and they are not at liberty to change it. Only when children are older, do they understand the concept of rules and that it could be changed with mutual consent from all the participants (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:318; Trawick-Smith, 1997:435). Piaget reasoned that pre-operational children do not have the cognitive ability to consider subjective factors in their moral reasoning. Such children would typically judge the 'wrongness' of an act by the negative consequences and not by the intent behind the action, because they cannot yet judge intent. Piaget's theory of moral development has been challenged, but it has been an influential theory in literature of child development (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:253).

According to Kohlberg's theory of moral development (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:254) children in Grade R fall under the first level of moral development, namely the pre-conventional level which includes preschool and early elementary age children. At this stage rules and obedience are enforced on the child from the outside. Children behave because they want to get rewards and avoid punishment. To them, right is what brings pleasant consequences and wrong is what causes unpleasant consequences. Reciprocity now develops, but only if it holds benefits for the child, in other words he is kind to those who are kind to him and hurts those who hurt him. Kohlberg's theory will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 (see 4.5.8.2).

### **The role of parents in the moral development of children**

Socialisation is the process through which children acquire socially acceptable behaviour and learn the values, knowledge and skills of the society in which they live and that underlies such behaviour. Parents must now instill in their children a sense of self-control and social propriety without quenching the children's emerging sense of autonomy and inquisitiveness (Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:541). This process already starts to develop shortly after babies' birth within the bond or attachment that develops between parent and child. Moral development is a process and children sometimes fail to act in manner that is a morally sound. Parents should never ignore this, but should discuss the incident, its consequences and how it made others feel. When children show remorse, there is an opportunity for growth (Scobey, 2015:43). From teaching children specific family rules in the home, parents can teach children to generalize rules and apply them to specific situations by stating what the reason behind the rule is. Preschool children already have the capacity to apply general rules to specific situations. When rules of interaction between a child and

an adult are established, the child can generalize these rules to peer interactions (Thompson & Twibell, 2009:214). Smith, *et al.* (2011:305) quote Dunn (2006) who found that it was the positive experiences that children had with their parents and the dynamics of intimate family relationships that had a profound effect on the moral development of the children. This finding has important implications for the proposed parenting programme and points to the importance of enabling parents to build strong family relationships, and create opportunities for pleasant experiences with their children.

### *Self-esteem and self-efficacy*

To understand about other people, children need to discover that they are separate from others. Self-awareness, in other words children's discovery that they are separate and different entities from the rest of the world, emerges between 15 and 24 months (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:220). Self-concept refers to a total picture of the self, including the physical appearance, abilities and personality (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:302; Smith, *et al.* 2011:215). Children base their self-concept on the way that they believe others see them. The small child's self-concept mainly includes external, physical attributes, while an older preschooler's self-concept includes intrinsic, psychological characteristics (Thompson, & Goodman, 2009:150). Originating from self-concept and the way that children believe others view them, self-esteem develops. Self-esteem contains a value judgement and indicates the self-worth and self-regard that children have for themselves (Dowling, 2014:14; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:303). It is related to the children's sense of significance and sense of feeling valuable and competent (Roberts, 2002:112). Self-efficacy is linked to self-esteem and refers to the judgement of one's own ability to reach a specific goal (Schunk & Pajares, 2002, 4-5). These concepts will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4 (see 4.5.2.2).

### *Importance of self-esteem and self-efficacy for school readiness*

All children need to have high self-esteem, because it influences the way that they deal with other people as well as their motivation to succeed in different domains of their development (Thompson & Goodman, 2009:150; Brennand, Hall, Fairclough, Nicholson & Rees, 2001:338). High self-esteem is important for healthy psychological development whereas low self-esteem has been associated with depression in children (Wu, Chen, Yang, Ding, Yang, & Sun, 2015:880; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:487). Self-efficacy determines a child's motivation to participate in a task, work hard and persevere when faced with difficulties (Schunk & Pajares, 2002, 4-5). Self-efficacy affects an individual's behaviour. If a student has a low level of self-efficacy, he may not even prepare himself for the exam, because he thinks much effort does not work. In contrast, those with high levels of self-efficacy are more hopeful and successful (Bameri & Jenaabadi, 2015:88). For children to learn, they need to believe that they are able to learn. If this belief is not established during the early years, it will unlikely do so later on (Dowling, 2014:27).

## **Role of parents in the development of self-esteem and self-efficacy**

Self-esteem develops during early childhood and is profoundly influenced by the family and environment in which children grow up (Wu, Chen, Yang, Ding, Yang & Sun, 2015:880; Dowling, 2014:14). Parenting styles seem to influence children's self-esteem. The children of parents who are warm and caring, who set clear boundaries, who include the children in decision making and encourage autonomy, tend to have a positive self-esteem (Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011:761; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:491). High self-esteem develops when a parent communicates unconditional love to a child (Roberts, 2002:111), listens to the child (Dowling, 2014:39), when the child is aware that the parent is always available and cares about what the child does and where he is (Kaplan & Owens, 2004:77), and when the parent creates opportunities for creative free-flow play for the child (Roberts, 2002:111). Even in adverse circumstances a warm, caring and respectful relationship with adults, in which children can experience a measure of pleasant interactions, can form the basis for the development of positive self-esteem (Caplan & Owens, 2004: 75). Shaffer and Kipp (2010:487) refer to studies that suggested that a secure attachment to a parental figure leads to the development of positive self-esteem. In this regard, Pinto, Veríssimo, Gatinho, Santos and Vaughn (2015:592) found that self-esteem of 5-6 year-olds was positively and significantly linked to attachment security and that it also predicted self-esteem in the peer group. Attachment to the father was a stronger predictor of self-esteem than attachment to the mother. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, is associated with moderate to severe family dysfunction (Wu, *et al.*, 2015:886). If parents constantly focus on their children's failures, the children will become convinced that they are worthless and unloved (Hildebrand, 1990:287). Harsh and coercive parenting leads to low self-esteem and a lack of confidence (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:232).

The development of self-efficacy in a small child rests within the family. Parents who are loving and supportive, who provide ample learning opportunities for their children to explore and to master different skills and activities, who are sound role models of perseverance and who provide their children with the opportunity to associate with peers who display self-efficacy, foster the development of self-efficacy in their children (Schunk & Pajares, 2002: 4-5). Being self-reliant, able to think and act independently and confidently are valuable individual protective factors (Benzies & Mychasiuk, 2009:105). The development of autonomy and the role that parents play in this regard will be discussed next.

### *Achieving autonomy*

School readiness requires a measure of autonomy. According to Davin and Van Staden (2005:2-4) a school ready child should be age appropriately independent in caring for himself and perform basic self-care activities such as dressing, toilet routine and using eating utensils. He should also be able to take responsibility for his own safety and hygiene by obeying basic rules.

The drive for independence starts early in life (Hildebrand, 1990:289; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:237). According to Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, the process of becoming autonomous, starts between eighteen months and three years, when children become independent and want to exercise their own choices. If parents are overly restrictive, the children develop doubt and shame about their individuality. During the following stage, children of three to six years need to be active, take risks and engage in creative, innovative activities. When they are not supported by the parent in these ventures, feelings of guilt may develop (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:45; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:237). Overwhelming guilt inhibits healthy emotional development (Travick-Smith, 1997:46). Bernier, Carlson and Whipple (2010:334) found that there was a link between mothers who encouraged their children to become autonomous and aspects of cognitive development. Cowan and Cowan (2012:84) found that children of parents who exercised harsh parenting and who were less encouraging of their children's autonomy, fared significantly poorer at school than other children.

### **The role of parents in the development of autonomy**

Autonomy develops through a process of trial and error. Parents need to find the balance between protecting their children too much in the process of exploring and pushing them to become independent and mature before they are ready. Both these behaviours could lead to over-dependency later on in life (Dowling, 2014:61). When parents do not trust children enough to allow them to try out things for themselves and make mistakes, the children will learn that they are not competent to do things for themselves and they will shy away and show 'helpless' behaviour when confronted with something new (Dowling, 2014:27). Parents need to encourage and praise all their children's efforts to become independent, whether they are successful or not, and refrain from blaming when the children make mistakes (Roberts, 2002:70). Children raised in a home where parents are controlling and harsh are unlikely to display initiative and confidence and are prone to be anxious in strange situations (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:232).

## **2.4 THE IMPORTANCE OF PARENTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL READINESS**

There is consensus amongst clinicians that parents, as key role players in children's immediate ecosystem (microsystem), play a critical role in the well-being and healthy development of children (Pitt, *et al.*, 2013:3; UNICEF, 2012:13; Lau, *et al.*, 2011:106; Bernier, Carlson & Whipple, 2010:326; Biersteker & Kwalsvig, 2007:172; Kaplan, & Owens, 2004:75; Rafoth, Buchenauer, Crissman, & Halko, 2004:2; Bowman, *et al.*, 2001:2). As such, they need to be included and empowered as partners in children's development and education at an early stage (Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry & Childs, 2004:467; Heckman, 2008:50; Lau, *et al.*, 2011:107). Parents' active involvement in home based educational activities and (later) homework, sends a clear message to children that education is valued and important (Kaplan & Owens, 2004:75). There is a close link

between the parents' level of education and that of their children. Better educated parents normally earn more, enabling them to obtain educational resources for their children (Reddy, *et al.*, 2015:16). Martin, Ryan and Brooks-Gunn (2010:146) confirm that optimal cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional development of preschoolers is promoted by the warmth, responsiveness and stimulating behaviours provided by a mother. Researchers in the South African context are of the same opinion (Pitt, *et al.*, 2013:3).

## **2.5 THE PROFILE OF THE AT RISK CHILD**

Mistry, *et al.* (2010:445) studied the social circumstances of children in the Head Start programme in the USA. The results of their study highlighted the profound adverse effect of exposure to cumulative risk, especially material hardship on children's development at school entry. The more children were exposed to family and social risks, the lower levels of cognitive and academic achievement, lower self-regulation and higher levels of behaviour problems they presented, compared to children who were not exposed to such risks. The high levels of adversity that the parents faced, impacted negatively on the warmth and responsiveness in the parent-child-interactions and the cognitive stimulation that they provided for their children as opposed to parents in families without the adverse circumstances.

A large body of empirical literature has documented the influence of early risk factors on children's emotional and behavioural adjustment. Children from poor homes who live in densely populated circumstances and who do not have access to early quality educational experiences, are at risk of not developing the necessary skills for successful transition to school (Young, 2015:420; Davies, 2011:65; Fantuzzo, Perry & McDermott, 2004:212; Eamon, 2001:257). Growing up in poverty during the preschool years could seriously thwart a child's school readiness, thus causing the child to start school at a disadvantage (Ngwaru, 2012:30; Ferguson, Isaacs, 2012:5; Bovaird & Mueller, 2007:703; McLoyd, 1998:198). It is not the poverty per se that causes the damage, but the repeated and long-term stressors associated with poverty, such as malnutrition, family trauma and despair, community violence, crime, and economic exploitation (Isaacs, 2012:5; McLoyd, 1998:198; Garbarino, 1995:54). Schonkoff and Phillips (2000:7) include in their description of multiple socio-economic risk factors untreated mental problems in the family and the demoralization and despair, resulting from repeated exposure to family and community violence. Children living in poverty, particularly in densely populated urban areas, are disproportionately exposed to early risk factors. Exposure to these multiple risks during critical periods of development, increases the likelihood that young children will face emotional and behavioural challenges as they adjust to school (Mistry, *et al.*, 2010:445; Raver, 2004:346; Qi & Kaiser, 2003:198; McClelland Morrison & Holmes, 2000:326; Osofsky, 1999:36). In later longitudinal research Raver, Blair, Garret-Peters and Family Life Project Key Investigators (2014:11) found

that repeated exposure to inter-parental physical violence leads to feelings of sadness, anxiety and withdrawal in preschool children, rendering them vulnerable for problems later on. High levels of adversity impact negatively on the warmth and responsiveness of parents in the parent-child-interactions and the cognitive stimulation that they provided for their children as compared to parents in more favourable circumstances (Mistry, *et al.*, 2010:445). Ziol-Guest and McKenna (2014:110) found that housing instability (moving house 3 or more times in the child's first 5 years) coupled with poor socio-economic conditions, impacted negatively on school readiness and it was associated with poor concentration and behaviour problems in preschoolers.

In South Africa roughly 75–80% of learners come from poor households and do not have the opportunity to attend quality preschool education (Spaull, 2015:37). Poverty and the factors that are associated with poverty, such as low levels of educational and occupational status, single parenthood, teenage pregnancy and lack of support from the biological father can seriously undermine the quality of parenting, damaging the life expectations of children, and thus perpetuating the cycle of poverty and inequality (Prinsloo, 2011:30; Ward, Makusha & Bray, 2015:69-71). Malnourished children's physical development is stunted, they suffer from a lack of energy and emotional control, and their attention span is limited (Arnold, *et al.*, 2006:6).

In spite of this sombre picture, researchers have found that parents can play a crucial role in shielding their children against the damaging effect of risk factors as mentioned above (Davies, 2011:64). As far back as 1999 Osofsky (1999:38) cited several studies that were undertaken to determine the effect of community violence or war on children. All these studies found that parents played a crucial role in ameliorating the traumatic effect of violence on their children. When children exposed to trauma were taken care of by their own parents or close family members, the effect of the trauma was less than with children who were separated from their parents. Raver (2004:346) also found in a literature study that responsive and sensitive caregiving can be predictive of competent self-regulation in spite of multiple risk factors. Martin, *et al.* (2010:152) found that the sensitive love and support from a father could make up for the lack of love from a depressed or uncaring mother. The Center on the Developing Child (2015, n.p.), Davies (2011:61) and Arnold, *et al.* (2006:10) believe that a supportive, caring relationship with an adult makes a child more resilient and shields him from the damaging influence of deprivation, poverty and violence. This is found to be the best explanation why some children who grow up in wretched circumstances, nevertheless grow up to be productive, stable individuals. Research amongst impoverished mothers in developing countries found that sensitive and responsive parenting contributed to improved health and cognitive and psychosocial development, despite impoverished living conditions (Eshel, *et al.*, 2006:992). These findings create the impression that there is hope for the Grade R learners in the target communities if the parents can be supported to love and

guide their children to rise above their circumstances and achieve their full potential despite the challenges.

## **2.6 CONCLUSION**

The importance of school readiness has been garnering much attention as a tool to ensure the future well-being of the individual child, to build up a country economically and to escape from poverty. It seems inevitable that children who lack school readiness fall behind from the start and that they rarely catch up. The high school drop-out rate in South Africa might partially be contributed to a lack of school readiness of many children entering the formal school system. In the long run this leads to a lack of vocational skills and unemployment in the country and is one factor that perpetuates the cycle of poverty. In the light of the stranglehold that poverty and unemployment have on millions of South Africans, it has become an imperative to invest resources in school readiness.

The focus of the literature study was the role that parents play in the development of school readiness of Grade R learners. Child development is described as the result of the continuous interactions between children and their environment, but it seems evident from literature that parents are the main role players in young children's development, and therefore play a determining role in whether children develop optimally in all domains of development. Regarding every aspect of school readiness development, there is a wealth of research confirming the importance of parents. It is the opinion of the researcher that parents play an indispensable role, especially in the development of the non-cognitive domains of emotional and social school readiness, through the secure attachment that they build with their children from birth, and the guidance and positive discipline that they exercise.

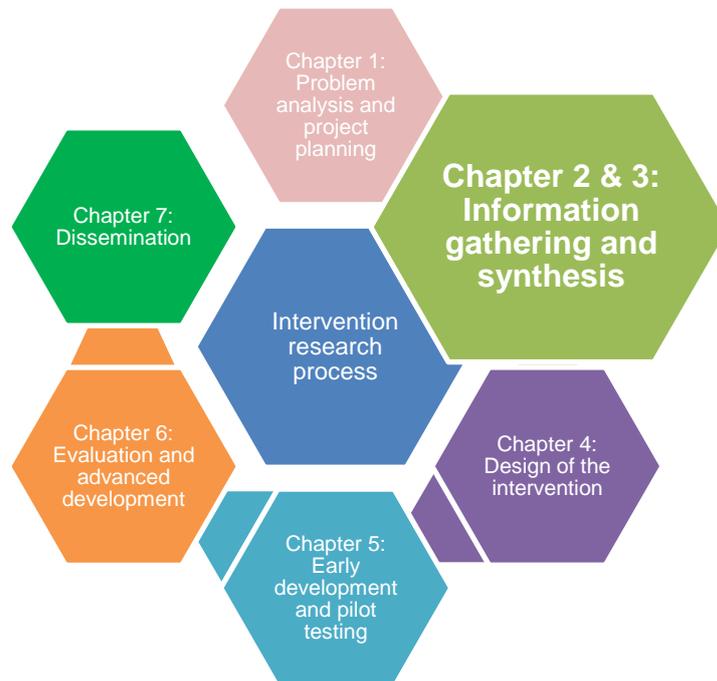
The detrimental effect of poverty and the influence that it has on the quality of parenting is described by many researchers. However, there are studies claiming that even in challenging circumstances it is possible that parents can effectively support their children and shield them from the effect of trauma and hardship. The aim of the researcher is to develop a parenting programme that will support parents in challenging socio-economic conditions to contribute to their children's school readiness. Against the background of the literature on the role of parents in the school readiness of Grade R learners, the parenting programme will be developed.

The next chapter deals with the data obtained from discussions of three focus groups with the professionals and parents working and living in the two target communities.

## CHAPTER 3

### EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTS OF SCHOOL READINESS AND PARENTING IN RESOURCE POOR COMMUNITIES

#### Phase 1: Information gathering and synthesis (Step 4)



### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

The first phase in the research process consisted of four steps. Steps 3 and 4 analysed the situation by using existing data and planning the proposed intervention programme. Existing data was gathered through a literature study (step 3) and conducting focus groups discussions (step 4) on the concepts of school readiness and parenting in the two target communities. This chapter contains the data provided by the participants of the focus groups.

### 3.2 FOCUS GROUPS

Three focus group discussions were conducted with professionals and parents working and living in the target communities. The main purpose of a focus group is to discuss a specific topic in a gathering of individuals who are homogenous in a certain area (Hays & Singh, 2012:252). The opinion of Engelbrecht (2016:115) is important, namely that focus groups are not about individual

meaning formation, but about joint and negotiated meaning formation. The aim of the focus groups was to obtain information from the professionals and parents with regards to the constructs of parenting and school readiness, specific to the target communities in which the proposed parenting programme was going to be presented. According to Hays and Singh (2012:255) Guthrie (2010:121), Rabiee (2004:655) and Walliman (2011:100) participants need not necessarily be representative of the population, but they are purposively selected to obtain information on a specific topic. Participants were purposefully selected as follows:

- The social workers of the welfare agency delivering services in the target community were all invited by e-mail to participate, and permission was obtained from their supervisor.
- The foundation phase educators in one of the schools were all invited by letter to participate and the permission of the principal was obtained.
- The parents of Grade 1 learners in another school where the parenting programme was presented, were invited by letter and the principal's permission to conduct the group at the school was obtained. These had to be parents who were available during the day and came to fetch their children at the school. The parents of Grade 1 learners were invited with the premise that, because they had had children in Grade R the previous year, they would be able to provide information on school readiness and how their own children had fared in this regard.

<b>Profile of social workers participating in the focus group discussion (SW-group)</b>			
Participant number	Academic qualifications	Years of experience	Field of expertise
SW1	Social Work (Hons) in Probation and correctional services	18 months	Foster care
SW2	Social Work (Hons) degree	10 years	Intake and early intervention
SW3	BA (Social Work)	2 years	Intake (contract worker)
SW4	BA (Social Work)	1 year	Prevention and early intervention
SW5	Diploma in Social Work	20 years	Statutory work
SW6	Dipl (Social Work)	15 years	Intake and early intervention

Participant group 1 (SW-group): The participants of the focus group with the social workers were employees of one office of the welfare agency working in both communities. The researcher conducted the focus group at the agency's office to save the social workers time, since they work under considerable pressure. Six social workers attended and the venue was a quiet discussion room at the office of the agency. The session started with the researcher explaining the aim of the focus group, discussing confidentiality and requesting the participants to sign the consent form.

The discussion took place in a relaxed atmosphere (Krueger, 2002:4). Even though the social workers were under pressure to return to their work, meaningful data was captured.

<b>Profile of educators participating in the focus group discussion (E-group)</b>			
Participant number	Qualifications	Grade	Years' experience
E1	B.Ed (Hons.)	Grade 1	18
E2	OD111 - JP	Grade 2	29
E3	N6 Educare + 2 years Gr R diploma	Grade R	2 years 8 months
E4	Lower Primary 11 De 111 - SP	Grade 3	40
E5	B.A. +Dipl. in Remedial Teaching	Learning support ed.	40
E6	NQ level 5, B.Ed 2 years	Grade R	18
E7	PGCE	3	15
E8	Details not completed (resigned)		

Participant group 2 (E-group): The participants of the educator group consisted of foundation phase educators in the one focus school. It was not possible to involve educators of different schools due to time constraints and practical problems. Through mediation of the principal all the educators were invited to participate. Eight educators attended. The discussion was held in the staff room at the school after the school had closed for the day. This was not the ideal venue. It was noisy outside and the chairs, situated along the walls of the staff room, were too heavy to move, with the result that the participants could not sit close to the microphone. Consequently, not all the information was captured on the voice recorder. The educators were also tired after a school day and the session could not be prolonged beyond one hour.

<b>Profile of parents participating in the discussion group (PC-group)</b>			
Participant number	Age	Educational level	Occupation
PC1	52	Grade 5	Volunteer at school
PC2	43	Grade 9	Housewife
PC3	34	Grade 12	Housewife
PC4	33	Grade 8	Housewife

Participant group 3 (PC-group): The focus group with parents of the community was held at one of the participating schools. Participants were invited through a written invitation handed to them by the Grade 1 educators with whom they were familiar. The time of the session was arranged one hour before the Grade 1's were released, so that the parents could collect their Grade 1 children

straight after the group. This was to save them coming to school twice in one day. Since only four parents turned up for the parents' focus group discussion, with one parent arriving late and another leaving early, it was considered whether the group could be regarded as a focus group. However, since Braun and Clarke (2013:115) believe small focus groups with as few as three participants are easier to manage and could provide rich and meaningful data, it was decided to still regard this group as a focus group. The focus group discussion was held in the staff room due to a shortage of venues and the discussion was interrupted several times due to people coming into the staff room, in spite of a notice on the door. Only four of the eight parents who were invited turned up, two of them came late and one had to leave early. The result was that the discussion could not last a full hour, because the parents had to collect their children when the bell rang. Late coming or non-attendance is not uncommon for parents in the target communities. The parents did not understand one or two questions and consequently did not respond to them appropriately. Although the parents were somewhat shy to participate, they were willing to assist and they provided valuable data from the viewpoint of people living in the community.

The researcher explained the purpose of the focus groups and obtained informed consent from all participants. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were explained to them. The researcher asked the permission of participants to make an audio recording of each session, since the researcher did not have a scribe who could take notes of the discussions (Krueger, 2002:9). The focus groups were conducted according to a pre-approved schedule with open-ended questions (Guthrie, 2010:121; Walliman, 2011:99).

According to Hays and Singh (2012:252) focus groups differ from interviews, in that they stimulate interaction amongst participants and they serve as a catalyst for disclosure and expanding on or challenging different viewpoints, instead of simply generating information. In both focus group discussions with the professionals, the participants mostly confirmed each other's comments and shared information on a professional and not on a personal level. However, in the parents' focus group, because of the topics of discussion, three of the parents divulged personal information and feelings pertaining to the problems that were discussed (see later).

### **3.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

The focus group discussions were captured on audio recorder and transcribed verbatim to allow for maximum accuracy before a thematic analysis was done. The transcription was done by a professional person who does court transcriptions and who is familiar with the principle of confidentiality. This person was recommended by another student of NWU. According to Braun and Clarke (2013:178) a thematic analysis is a way to analyse and organise data in order to identify meaningful patterned responses or themes regarding the research question. Walliman

(2011:133) describes several steps in the coding process when he speaks of pattern coding where coded information is then again reduced to more compact and meaningful units of analysis. After reading and rereading the transcriptions, the researcher coded the data to identify repetitive patterns across the three focus group discussions, compared the different views expressed and captured the richness of the information divulged. The themes that emerged across the data set were remarkably similar and no contradictions were found. The results of the three focus groups were then collated according to identified themes, and vivid extracts conveying the spirit of the interviews were identified and added (Braun & Clarke, 2006:86).

### **3.4 ETHICS**

Ethics, or standards of professional conduct, were followed as outlined in literature (Guthrie, 2010:15; Hays & Singh, 2012:74; Walliman, 2011:42; Thomas, 2009:8-9). The researcher obtained ethical clearance from the Health Research Ethic Committee of the Faculty of Health Sciences of North-West University (Potchefstroom Campus) before commencing the research, as well as from the Department of Education head office and from the principals of the three schools where the research was to be conducted. The concepts of confidentiality and voluntary participation were explained to the participants and their signed informed consent was obtained (Guthrie, 2010:17; Hays & Singh, 2012:79-80; Walliman, 2011:47). The researcher endeavoured to make the participants feel at ease by being friendly and welcoming, explaining the importance of the contribution that they could make and by serving refreshments. No harm was intended and it was explained to all three groups that they formed part of a research project that would hopefully benefit the children in their communities and ultimately the communities as a whole (Hays & Singh, 2012:79; Walliman, 2012:48). In analyzing and interpreting the research results, the researcher endeavoured to be honest and unbiased with the support of the researcher's study leader.

### **3.5 SCHOOL READINESS**

The topic of school readiness was discussed with the educators and the parents in the two target communities. The educators were asked what they understand under this concept and they mostly mentioned emotional aspects of school readiness. E1 described school ready children as children who are ready to learn, who adapt well in school, who feel at home and do not cry when they have to stay behind in class when their parents leave. E2 felt that children should be inquisitive and ready to learn and ask questions. E3 said that they should have a fundamental understanding of basic things in life, so that they can follow instructions that are on their level. She added that, *'For me readiness is about the knowledge that he comes to school with. Does he understand the basic stuff? Does he understand the fundamental things that he must do? Does he understand how to follow an instruction that you give him on his level? When a child can do that, I feel he is ready for*

*that...to deal with problems.*' The parents did not have a clear understanding of the concept of school readiness and only PC3 volunteered an answer and remarked that children need to be eager to learn. The parents confirmed that nobody had ever explained to them what school readiness entails and what was expected of them and of their children.

Although the participants did not provide a comprehensive description of school readiness, they touched on the multi-dimensional nature of school readiness by referring to cognitive skills (a basic body of knowledge) as well as non-cognitive skills of social and emotional readiness (the ability to separate from the parents, readiness/eagerness to learn, the ability to ask questions and follow instructions) as described in literature (Lau, Li & Rau, 2011:97; UNICEF, 2012: 9-10).

The mothers agreed with the educators that parents play a pivotal role in supporting their children to become school ready. One mother (PC1) commented that parents are truly the most important factor in their children's school readiness. *'The parent is really the most important ... at home one is taught one must prepare the child. One must not expect that the child will only start learning when he goes to school.'* Another parent (PC3) said it is important that a parent create a child friendly environment at home for the child and, for example, put colourful pictures on the wall and talk about the pictures. This is necessary for the child to become eager to learn. PC3 regarded the environment as very important and felt that mothers are more important in making their children school ready than fathers. E3 felt that it depends totally on the parent, because the children of good parents who stimulate their children, take them to the library and teach them colours and numbers, are more school ready than children who have attended Grade R.

The educators mentioned that many children entering the school system are not school ready. These children fall behind at an early stage and most of them never catch up. According to the educators there are many children who start Grade 1 but who cannot work on their own. E4 said that some learners entering Grade 1 *'have a short attention span, actually they only disrupt the class because they are playful, they don't pay attention, they prevent other learners from working.'* Learners who enter school late and are two years older than their peers, sometimes bully other learners. According to E4 (a Grade 3 educator) about half of the children in her class had a backlog. Research has proven that learners who enter school with insufficient school readiness skills, fall behind their peers from the outset (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016). E5 stated that, in one Grade 3 class of 45 learners, only 9 learners had not repeated a year since starting Grade 1.

### 3.6 STRENGTHS WITH REGARDS TO PARENTING

All the participants agreed that there are many parents in the target communities who are committed, responsible parents. One social worker (SW2) said: 'There are parents who persevere in spite of hardship, who live in challenging circumstances, but they get up to go to work and take their children to school. They are 'perseverers' (deurdrukkers). Another social worker (SW3) said that parents would go hungry rather than see their children suffer. *'I had a case of a mother who said she goes to bed hungry, but she sees to it that her children – even if they only eat bread with peanut butter or just butter with tea.'* With regards to the children SW1 said that there are many well-mannered children in school who learn and display good manners. *'Then those cute children sit there and they are decent and they learn and they greet one, they get up and greet the Sir. Then I think, oh, at least there are many well-mannered children also.'*

### 3.7 CHALLENGES REGARDING PARENTING

The following discussion will deal with the problems divulged by the focus groups pertaining to parenting and the problems in the two communities that impact on parenting and on the school readiness of children in the communities.

#### 3.7.1 Poverty and the effect that it has on parenting and school readiness

In South Africa roughly 75–80% of learners come from poor households and they do not have the opportunity to attend quality pre-school education (Spaull, 2015:37). Poverty has a seriously detrimental effect on early child development and school readiness (Isaacs, 2012:5; Ngwaru, 2012:30; Ferguson, Bovaird & Mueller, 2007:703; McLoyd, 1998:198). All three focus groups agreed that poverty and unemployment are rife in the two target communities. One of the social workers (SW3) alleged that they find unemployment and poverty at approximately every second home. *'And then also the unemployment rate is just as high ... yes, just ... and I think it also has an impact and everything. Because, as you said, just about every second home nobody works in the house. I do not know where the people get their income from. This is also where the stealing comes from, scrap metal must be collected and then they also sit on the street corners.'* Unemployed community members are dependent on government grants for survival. The educators also confirmed severe poverty (E2, E3, E4 & E5) and E4 commented that 99% of the community is unemployed and in poverty. According to E5 some learners live in one room dwellings with no running water or toilets and no privacy. *'... half of my children in my class live in a bungalow ...there are no toilets in the house,...all that...the social conditions also influence that child's development'*. E3 mentioned that many parents are stuck in overcrowded homes where there is no privacy and no space for a child to do homework *'...that lack of ... there is no privacy, in the sense of...there is only one room ... and there are four children in that house.'*

In a report by the World Bank (2011) Naudeau, *et al.*, (2011:22) describe the risk factors associated with poverty that seriously impact on early childhood development leading to school readiness, as 'less stimulating learning environments, less responsive parenting, more frequent depression amongst mothers, poor nutrition, a higher prevalence of domestic violence, poor housing conditions, community violence and pollution'. The social workers said they often come across parents who seemed depressed (SW1, SW2, SW3, SW5). The developmental delays caused by these risk factors increase as children grow older (Naudeau, *et al.*, 2011:17). Families living in impoverished communities often face multiple stressful life events, including family trauma and despair, substance abuse, gang violence, housing instability, malnutrition, and incarceration. It is not the poverty per se that causes the problems, but the problems associated with it (Ziol-Guest & McKenna, 2014:110; Isaacs, 2012:5; Collins, *et al.*, 2011:31).

Eamon (2001:257-263) describes the effect of poverty on children's socioemotional development by using the theory of bioecological development as described by Bronfenbrenner. From this perspective it is not only proximal processes within the microsystem that exercise an influence on children's development, but also the distal processes of the meso-, exo-, macro- and chronosystems. The daily strain of poverty leading to parental depression and a depletion of healthy coping skills, has a detrimental influence on children's socioemotional development. The effect of poverty on other microsystems is rejection and stigmatization by the peer group, and attendance of poorly resourced schools with a low quality of teaching. On a mesosystem level, this could lead to behaviour problems, which in turn has an influence on parenting behaviour (Eamon, 2001:263). With regards to exosystems, poor parents may lack sufficient social support to enable them to cope, and they may live in poorly resourced communities where their children are exposed to violence or other social ills. On a macro level, cultural beliefs and social policies governing access to economic, housing, educational and other opportunities, may exercise a detrimental effect on proximal processes, exacerbating the effect of poverty on children.

The psychosocial problems associated with poverty in the target communities as narrated by the focus groups, as well as the impact that it has on parenting and school readiness, will be discussed next.

### **3.7.2 Inability to build trusting relationships**

Okado, Bierman and Welsch (2014:365), Mesman, *et al.* (2012:246), Puckering (2004:39) and Lorenz, Simons and Whitbeck (1992:537) are among many researchers who have found consistently and over time that poverty and the impact of poverty on the quality of parents' parenting skills, are severe. A lack of parenting skills is a common problem that the social workers (SW1, SW2 and SW4) and educators (E2, E3 and E4) mentioned. SW1 said that many parents seem to lack basic parenting skills when dealing with their small children. When a child gets hurt,

they do not seem to know that the child needs to be comforted. *'...but just the way that they are with the little ones. There is just not those basic skills of, when the child falls and gets hurt, to do something and give him a little attention. I almost want to say they are very uninformed about how you must be a mother.'* This participant added that *'There is nothing of, yes I love my child, I feel so and so. They do not know how to talk about those feelings of, you know, why you connect with this baby who is part of your life. It is my child because it is my child.'* SW1 said it seems as if many parents lack a natural mothering instinct or normal loving feelings towards their children. He had encountered this time and again. Participant SW2 added that parents do not tolerate the social workers questioning them about their feelings for their children. They respond with: *'I produced my child out of my own body'*. (Translation of: *'Ek het my kind uit my dingese uitgekry'*.) SW4 told about a mother whose child was removed from her care and placed in a children's home, but this mother never bothered to make contact with her. SW2 dealt with a case where one mother left her new born baby in a plastic bag in the street and dogs came and chewed on the baby's legs. According to SW1 many mothers apparently feel that they have done their duty when they have carried the baby for 9 months. If they feed and wash the child now and again, they feel that they are doing enough. This social worker explained that children are not summarily removed from the parent's care. Social workers first endeavour over a period of months to support the parent to develop parenting skills. Sometimes after many sessions, when there is no improvement and the child has to be removed, the parents still do not grasp what is wrong. *'It is after one has walked the road with them for weeks and months and explained to them exactly what should happen... And then eventually when the child is removed, [explain] why the child is possibly going to be removed then ...it is only that understanding is just not there. You can sit and talk again and again and session after session...'* SW3, SW4 added to this comment that the social workers are now regarded by the community as the people who take children away ('afvatter'). *'Oh, here comes the man who takes the children away'* (SW4).

Jones, Cassidy and Shaver (2014:24) studied literature on parents' parenting styles and their own internal working models of attachment, and came to the conclusion that insecurity in parents was consistently related to a host of unfavourable parenting outcomes, including less sensitive and supportive parenting, an elevated risk of child abuse (Jones, *et al.*, 2014:11), less desire to have children, and less feelings of closeness to their children, as well as higher stress levels and poorer parenting coping skills than secure parents (Jones, *et al.*, 2014:17). The importance of a warm, nurturing relationship with at least one parent, is consistently mentioned in literature dealing with school readiness, as already discussed in Chapter 2. Children grow and thrive in the context of close and dependable relationships that provide love and nurturance, security, responsive interaction, and encouragement for exploration. Without at least one such relationship, development is disrupted and the consequences can be severe and long lasting (Martin, *et al.*, 2010:152; Schonkoff & Phillips, 2000:6). Optimal cognitive, behavioural and social, and emotional

development of preschoolers is promoted by the warmth, responsiveness and stimulating behaviours provided by a mother (Martin, *et al.* 2010:146; Pitt, *et al.*, 2013:3). Consistent loving parenting plays an important role in brain development (Gerhardt, 2009:2; National Scientific Council on the Developing child, 2004:1) and it contributes to the development of various skills vital to school readiness (Dowling, 2014:36; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:232; Kraemer, 2011:2; Furrer & Skinner, 2003:158). According to Evans and Kim (2013:43) less responsive parenting in low-income families includes less attention and emotional support, as well as less instrumental support such as assistance with homework or practical help.

The lack of responsive, supportive parenting of parents in the communities and their failure or inability to build trusting, loving relationships with their children, could seriously jeopardise the children's early development and school readiness and should be addressed in the parenting programme.

### **3.7.3 Parenting style**

Another way in which poverty seems to affect school readiness in the two target communities is the way that it influences parenting style. Baumrind (1967, 1997) as cited by Mitchell and Ziegler (2013:232-234) and Martorell, *et al.* (2014:324) describe three broad parenting styles that are associated with certain outcomes. The outcomes of *authoritative parenting*, where parents combine warm, supportive parenting with strict discipline and a democratic approach, is considered to be the most beneficial for children (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:325; Chan & Koo, 2011:396). An *authoritarian parenting* style is high in discipline and demandingness, but with little or no love and affection. Such parents exercise harsh discipline and demand instant unquestioning obedience from their children. Children raised by authoritarian parents display low self-esteem, little initiative and independence and high anxiety levels in unfamiliar situations. This parenting style also leads to underdeveloped morality (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:232). *Permissive parents* are loving but noncontrolling and undemanding (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:324). They leave their children alone practically to fend for themselves and exert little or no control over their behaviour and choices. The children are not taught discipline and good manners and the parents will seldom set limits. Apart from caring for the children and playing with them occasionally, they are not much involved in the children's lives. The children of permissive parents are typically impulsive, inconsiderate and exhibit a lack of self-control. They have little regard for rules and cannot work systematically and with dedication to achieve long-term goals, but they pursue instant gratification (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:233). Martorell, *et al.* (2014:324) and Santrock (2014:401) cite Maccoby and Martin (1983) who added another parenting style, namely *neglectful or uninvolved*. This style of parenting is characterized by an omission by the parents to fulfil any of their children's physical and emotional needs and which has been found to be the most damaging for children. These children perceive that other aspects in their parents' lives are more important than they are. They

frequently display low self-esteem, poor social skills, lack of self-control and tend to become delinquent and truant when they become adolescents (Santrock, 2014:401).

Indications of harsh punishment associated with an authoritarian parenting style were found in the target communities. Several studies have confirmed that living with material hardship causes parents to act harsh and insensitive towards their children (Mesman, *et al.*, 2012:245; Puckering, 2004:41-42; Wade, 2004:203). According to Evans and Kim (2013:43) there is more hostility and conflict in disadvantaged families and they are more inclined to use corporal punishment than more affluent families. This was found to be true in the target communities. The educators mentioned that children are beaten quite often. One parent (PC3) mentioned that parents apply harsh punishment when their children transgress. *'There is violence that comes from the forefathers, but there are parents who exercise extreme punishment.'* PC1 told the group that, when her grandson went to high school, he became involved in a group of friends who had a bad influence on him and he started smoking dagga. She tried everything, but to no avail. Then one day, the boy's grandfather told him that he was going to hit him 'like a man' to force him to stop. *'I had already tried everything. And then one day his grandfather hit him like a man hits a man ...he hit him in De...Road.'* This parent commented that, in this community, parents have to fight to prevent their children from becoming involved in drugs, gangsterism and other problems. *'This is how drastic one wants to be to keep one's child from the claws of [problems in the community such as substance abuse] ... one must fight.'*

From an ecological perspective, parents do not live in isolation and their own development is shaped by their interactions with the systems in which they grow up (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:797; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243). Their parenting style and relationship with their children is most likely an extension of their own internal working model of attachment that was mainly shaped by their attachment to their parents (Davies, 2011:44; Dowling, 2000:36; Kraemer, 2011:2; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:232). With regards to meso- and exosystems, Kotchick and Forehand (2002:263) caution that neighbourhoods can have a profound effect on the quality of parenting and that parenting cannot be understood or studied outside of its neighbourhood context. In the same vein McWayne, Owsianik, Green and Fantuzzo (2008:189) warn against researchers applying traditional western concepts of parenting on marginalized communities, and drawing conclusions without taking into account the 'within-context realities' at play in those communities. Their own research and studies that they cite (McWayne, *et al.*, 2008:174), found that an authoritarian style or a combination of authoritative and authoritarian parenting styles, could protect children better when these children were regularly confronted by high risk environmental challenges.

The researcher postulates that parenting styles could be found on a continuum with differing degrees of the various elements, and that parents could adopt a parenting style that does not

adhere strictly to the one or the other style as described in literature, but one that needs to be understood in the light of their living conditions.

### **3.7.4 Lack of stimulation**

The problem of lack of stimulation was described by the educators, since it was a topic that was close to their field of specialisation. E1 felt that parents have a lack of knowledge and awareness of how to support their children's development. E5 added that parents do not stimulate their children and do not expose them to healthy resources. *'They do not know about a computer, they do not know about a YOU, they do not know about a HUISGENOOT. They only know the SON [a newspaper with a focus on sensation, commonly read in the two communities].'* Participant E3 remarked that many children do not possess the minimum knowledge required to understand simple things discussed in class, for example going to the beach or who lives in a zoo. *'So their general knowledge is so minimal that he cannot ...you cannot find that child in your class. So gradually, this is why you can see it now already that the child is going to repeat, because his knowledge ... he doesn't understand. He does not know the concept of doing things, working constructively on his own or that.'* According to E1 and E4 many children have had no exposure to books prior to school entry. The first place where they encounter books, is in the school. E4 said these learners do not like reading and they often show no respect for books by tearing up books and throwing them to each other. They are very destructive. E4 takes time to cover and beautify her learners' books. After a week or two, the books are torn and scratched. However, they love it when educators read to them. E1 remarked that television has taken the place of reading. E4 added that, when the mothers come from work, they must clean the house, do the cooking and caring for four children. There is no time to see to it that their children do homework. E1 asked a child in her Grade 1 class, who could not follow instructions, what he and his mother did together when he was with her, upon which he boldly replied: *'I wasn't in a crèche and my mommy didn't do anything with me at home'*. She then asked him, *'What did mommy normally do with you?'* He then replied: *'I watched TV, teacher, I played. Mommy never gave me a pen and a book.'* E1 commented: *'So obviously these things influence his academic progress... and it's sad, it's sad, very sad.'* It turned out that this Grade R boy is now very disruptive in class and he cannot concentrate.

Many studies confirm that stimulation of children by parents plays a vital role in the development of different domains of school readiness (Bracken & Fishel, 2008:45; Davies, 2011:263; Dove, *et al.*, 2015:174; Edwards, 2014:71; Farver, *et al.*, 2006:207; Horwath, 2007:46; Machet & Pretorius, 2003:40; Ngwaru, 2012:34;). Researchers have also found that poverty is associated with less cognitive stimulating environments (Naudeau, *et al.*, 2011:22) and with a lack of age-appropriate toys, printed media and educational resources (Evans & Kim, 2013:43). Young (2015:422) researched the effect of poverty on children's intellectual ability and he poignantly describes the

backlog that children from deprived circumstances have when they are expected to have knowledge of things that they have never encountered: *'That which a child has not touched, tasted, seen, heard, learned, or experienced, he simply does not know, whatever his intellectual potential.'* In contrast to children from a literacy rich home environment, children from disadvantaged backgrounds are likely to start school with a lack of access to books and without adequate knowledge of books or how they work. They cannot imagine the value of books and reading. These children are slower in learning to read than other children, and this could have a detrimental effect on their school progress and their future life. Such children may enter school without ever having encountered a book (Machet & Pretorius, 2003:39-40). Lara-Cinisomo, *et al.* (2004:10) found that there is a definite link between poverty, low maternal education and a less supportive literacy environment. Whitehurst and Lonigan (1998:859) cite Adams (1990), who estimated that the typical middle-class child in the USA enters first grade having experienced 1,000—1,700 hours of one-on-one picture book reading, whereas a child from a low-income family averages just 25 hours.

There may be several reasons why impoverished parents fail to stimulate their children's cognitive development. In the South African context, Strydom (2011:113) states that learners who grow up in a restricted environment where they are exposed to hunger, illness or danger, will focus more on physical survival than on school work and there will not be adequate opportunity for cognitive development. Another reason may be ignorance. Bruwer, *et al.*, (2014:27) found that children from deprived backgrounds lacked the necessary cognitive skills for school readiness when their parents had no idea what the formal school system required from their children. It seems as if ignorance on the side of parents might play a role in the lack of school readiness in the target communities. The participating parents all confirmed that nobody had informed them of what school readiness entailed and what their role in this regard was. This remark might be interpreted as an indication of a lack of knowledge rather than a lack of caring. The parents also had a very vague idea of what school readiness entailed. From the educators' side, E1 mentioned that many parents are not aware of the basic things in their homes that can be utilised to make the child school ready. The previous year E1 and other educators had presented a parenting programme, and the parents were surprised by the simple games and the usable concepts that they were taught. The parents did not realise how they could use the environment and everyday objects and resources to stimulate their children. A parenting programme with practical advice and guidance on how to create a more cognitively stimulating environment and use the resources available in homes and communities, might successfully address this shortcoming.

### **3.7.5 Neglect**

Neglect was mentioned by the social workers as the most prevalent form of child abuse encountered in the target communities. According to the educators, they also regularly encounter

severely neglected learners. Neglect is a form of child abuse that is not always identified, because it is not as incident-specific or dramatic as other forms of child abuse (Music, 2009:143), yet it has a profoundly detrimental effect on all domains of children's development and school readiness (Daniel, Taylor, Scott, Derbyshire & Nielson, 2011:17; The Centre on the Developing Child, 2013; Horwath, 2007:67; Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002:679). Daniel, *et al.* (2011:17) cite Bromfield and Miller (2007) who regard neglect as equal to multiple adverse events in a child's life, because of the 'unrelenting low level of care' that impacts daily on the child's life. Neglect is also the most prevalent form of child abuse reported by international researchers (Horwath, 2007:42; Hildyard & Wolfe, 2002:679; Schumacher, Smith, Slep, & Heyman, 2001:231) as well as by the social work focus group in the two target areas.

#### 3.7.5.1 *Physical neglect*

With regards to physical neglect, the educators (E2 & E3) alleged that they come across many cases of severe neglect, where learners come to school dirty and unwashed and wear untidy school uniforms. (E3) *'Children come to school very neglected. They are not washed. A head that has not been washed for a whole month. Everything is always dirty ... this is scruffiness.'* The social workers confirmed the high incidence of physical neglect. SW1 told about cases where the babies' diapers are never changed during the whole day or where the babies are not wearing diapers and the clothes are dirty. The mothers go out to find an income (*'skarrel'*), leaving the children locked up in a room or a shack. *'...neglect such as a child is not cleaned every day, goes with a dirty diaper or without a diaper, dirty clothes. Just because the mother is too busy collecting money, going 'skarrel-skarrel' for her money you know, for the drug abuse. And that which one sees a lot, and the child crying. Many, most of the babies that we find are – for example the neighbours will now phone, then the police come to see, then the child is now perhaps alone locked up in a little house, a hokkie or in a room. And the older children (kindertjies) when you arrive there, they just look after themselves. They wander around. They keep themselves busy wearing dirty clothes.'*

School ready children need to be physically healthy and fit enough to be active and participate in activities in the classroom and on the playground. This domain also includes perceptual skills and gross and fine motor skills (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:4; Barbarin, *et al.*, 2008:674). Pascoe, Wood, Duffee and Kuo (2016:n.p.) state that the link between poverty and poor health care for children, is well established. Neglectful parents fail to secure health care for their children. Participant SW3 mentioned that parents do not take their children for immunisation; they just say the clinic card is lost. Children's health is sometimes neglected and they are not taken to hospital for treatment of serious diseases. One child had to be removed from the parent's care and taken to the chest hospital for treatment for tuberculosis. Another four-year-old child was so seriously malnourished

that her stomach extended as if she was pregnant, which could be indicative of Kwashiorkor (severe child malnutrition caused by inadequate protein intake) (SW4).

#### 3.7.5.2 Educational neglect

The educators mentioned another form of neglect that could be regarded as failure to provide in children's educational needs. According to the Children's Act (2005), failure to provide in children's educational needs is included in the description of child abuse. The educators find that many parents do not care to become involved in their children's school progress while others work long hours and have little time for their children (E4). Some are single parents. Some are very young and they are not ready to be parents (E2). Some parents never come when they are requested to attend a meeting with an educator and those are often the parents who do not care enough to see to it that their children do homework. *'You get those children who never do homework and the parents are not interested.'* They do not cooperate with the school in the interest of their children and it is often the very learners who battle to make progress whose parents do not care enough to visit the school (E4). In many homes the mother works and the father is at home, but apparently he does not care enough to be involved in the child's school work. The mother is then too tired after work to carry out her motherly responsibilities (E1). According to the educators (E4, E5) the children of such parents will always have a backlog – they do not catch up. *'We as educators must then go back with that group who do not have the basic knowledge and those children will always have a backlog.'* (E5). E4 added: *'I will say if a person does not get the support of parents ... look, a person calls your parent in, a person lets the parent know, look, this is the backlog ... but the parents are not interested.'*

#### 3.7.5.3 Administrative neglect:

According to the social workers many children are not enrolled in school because their births were never registered. There is one mother who has six children without birth registration, because her own birth was never registered (SW4). Children are sometimes of school going age, five to seven years old, but they have not been enrolled in school (SW3). As far as they can gather, schools are not supposed to accept children without a birth certificate, but they are now compelled to do so. There are children in the community who are already 8 or 14 years old, but they have never been in a school, because the schools refuse to enrol them without a valid birth certificate. Sometimes the mother's birth was never registered, so she has to go through a whole process with the Department of Home Affairs to first register herself before she can register her children (SW3).

According to Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory child development emerges from continuous interactions between the child and the context in which he grows up (Rosa & Tudge, 2013:243). Children's cognitive development, including their pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, is thus also dependent on continuous interaction with their parents and immediate environment (Bernier, *et al.*,

2010:326; Arnold, *et al.*, 2006:5; Roberts, 2002:6). Early experiences have a direct and determining influence on the development of the brain, and subsequently also on the nature and extent of later skills and abilities (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011, n.p.; Data Book 2013:1; Bernier, Carlson & Whipple, 2010:326; Horwath, 2007:46; Arnold, *et al.*, 2006:5; Roberts, 2002:6). Font and Berger (2015:549) found a strong inverse association of neglect with cognitive development and social-emotional development and a positive association with behaviour problems. Severe physical neglect leads to serious physical delays and stunted growth (The Centre on the Developing Child, 2013, n.p.), depriving children of the ability to participate fully in classroom activities. Hildyard and Wolfe (2002:681-682) found in their literature study on the effect of neglect, that the cognitive and educational backlog of neglected children was more severe than that of groups with other forms of maltreatment. This included language development. Music (2009:153) and The Centre on the Developing Child (2013, n.p.) agree that the effect of neglect on developing children could be more severe than that of other forms of abuse. When the account of the participants of child neglect is compared to literature, it seems inevitable that children who are neglected will fall far short of developing the range of skills necessary for school readiness and successful entry into the formal school system.

### **3.7.6 Physical abuse**

The use of harsh punishment, which might be interpreted as physical abuse, was mentioned above. The educators also mentioned that children are beaten a lot. E3 alleged that parents apply harsh punishment and she described the detrimental effect it has on children's self-esteem and academic progress: *'There at home the child is beaten a lot. That child has no self-worth, self-esteem. And a child without self-worth and self-esteem cannot learn ... I will not say cannot learn, but it is more difficult for that child to learn and to concentrate.'*

Knickerbocker, Heyman, Slep, Jouriles and McDonald (2007:39) found in their literature review of the co-occurrence of partner abuse and child physical abuse, that child physical abuse occurred in 22–67% of families characterized by partner physical abuse compared to the 4.4% rate that was found in the general population. Children were not always the target for abuse, but were injured when they sought comfort from one parent during a violent outburst, or when they tried to intervene to stop the violence (Knickerbocker *et al.*, 2007:40). Ezzo and Young (2012:152) also list domestic violence as a risk factor for child abuse.

In South Africa there is currently no law prohibiting parents to apply corporal punishment, although it was outlawed in schools years ago. The problems arise when there is disagreement regarding what constitutes corporal punishment and where physical abuse starts. At the moment there is strong lobbying from activists for children's rights for legislation to prohibit any physical punishment by parents (Bower, 2016; Global Initiative to End All Corporal Punishment of Children, 2016;

Sonke Gender Justice, 2016). At the time of this report, there was no legislation to change this state of affairs.

### **3.7.7 Sexual abuse**

According to the social workers, different forms of sexual abuse are found in these communities. One kind is exposure to adult sexual behaviour, leading to a repetition of the sexual behaviour by the children. Sexual abuse also affects children's self-esteem. SW3 shared: *'This definitely has an effect, and it causes children to have low self-esteem, especially a girl who has been molested. For her it is nothing to fall back onto drugs or on the way ... to go and sell her body, because she feels she does not love her body, because it happened to her when she was little. So it definitely has an impact on the child's life as the child gets older.'* One social worker was involved in a case where a girl had to go out and sell herself. When she did not return with money, the mother and the mother's boyfriend were very angry. In another case the mother literally took her daughter and sold her on the street as a prostitute. There was also a case of three young children who disappeared every weekend and parents did not show any concern. It was then discovered that these children were taken to the house of a person who used them for child prostitution and they were paid R30.00 each per weekend.

According to Ezzo, *et al.*, (2012:152) risk factors for the various forms of child abuse as described above, include a history of family violence or child abuse, parental anti-social behaviour or mental health problems, single parenthood and multiple fathers for the children in a family, domestic violence in the current relationship, a poor parent-child relationship, including poor attachment with the child, a negative view of the parent of the child's behaviour and harsh discipline, community violence and parental unemployment. Most of the above risk factors were mentioned by the participants as characteristic of the target communities and are discussed briefly in this chapter. It is therefore not surprising that various forms of child abuse allegedly do occur quite frequently.

Child abuse and neglect as discussed above are regarded as traumatic experiences for children, and a threat to their social, emotional and behavioural development that could have serious long-lasting implications if left untreated (Purvis, McKenzie, Razuri, Cross & Buckwalter, 2014:357; Samuels, 2013:19-20). Music (2011:113) states that many abused and neglected children appear to have a lack of moral sense, an inability to empathise and to reach out to others in a helping fashion, and they struggle to fit into the usual social expectations and norms. In an earlier study Music (2009:153) found that neglected children are severely handicapped in their emotional development. They do not learn to deal with difficult situations and emotional challenges. They have no pleasant life experiences to draw from and therefore they have little sense of enjoyment and hope. Font and Berger (2015:549) found a strong association of early childhood abuse with deficits in cognitive skills and behavioural development.

Clearly child abuse and neglect are traumatic actions that could seriously impact on children's early development and school readiness. Judging from the comparison of data provided by the participants in the target communities and the research described in literature, the probability that there are many children who are not school ready, due to the detrimental impact of child abuse and neglect, seems high.

### **3.7.8 Parental substance abuse**

All three focus groups agreed that one of the most serious social problems in the community is substance abuse. According to the social workers many parents abuse drugs, resulting in child abuse and neglect. SW1 explained his estimate of the prevalence of substance abuse as follows: *'I think if I took a hundred of my (client) files where child abuse or neglect appears, 95 of them would be because of substance abuse of the parent. If you can solve that problem, then 95% of my cases will disappear. Possibly.'* Participant SW4 stated that some parents that are addicted to drugs, draw the child support grant meant for their children, although the children live with the grandmother and therefore the money never reaches the child for whom it is meant. This situation leads to many arguments in families. *'Arguments over the child support grant, this is also a big issue in the community. Because you, who are a drug addict, now receive the grant and the children live with grandmother. The money never reaches the children.'*

The parents confirmed the view of the social workers that there is severe drug abuse in the community. According to PC2, parents who abuse substances are not interested in their children. Participant PC1 reacted very passionately: *'It breaks up many marriages, home lives ... and then the child at school has to suffer because of it.* One mother (PC2) told the group that her brother abuses drugs and she added vehemently: *'I do not know where TIK comes from, o Lord, I want this to disappear from the community, so that the children can only be helped.'* Many young people also abuse drugs. Another parent (PC1) told the group that her school-going grandson became involved with gangsters selling drugs outside the school premises. The educators confirmed that drug abuse, and particularly TIK (methamphetamine), is very common in the community. E4 believe that, if a person does not use TIK, he does not fit into the community. This participant said that the learners are very familiar with drugs and some of them know all about smoking dagga – the whole process. *'I think if one doesn't use TIK, one does not fit into the community. The children, they can explain to me how people put the dagga into the thing, the whole process and for them being a relative in the TIK home, nothing is unusual to them.'* Participants E2 and E3 agreed that substance abuse is rife in the community. Participant E2 told of a boy in her class in Grade 1 who loved shooting pigeons with a slingshot (kettie). The other learners told this participant that the boy learnt that from his older brother who smoked TIK. Participant E4 had a

learner in her class who had to collect cigarette butts for the father after school. When the educator scolded him, the father came and scolded the educator.

There is also severe alcohol abuse. Participant PC2 told the group how children come to her for encouragement when their parents abuse alcohol: *'Auntie N..., my mother drank again last night.'* Then she says to them: *'Ag, look past those things.'* She added that this makes children angry: *'Then that child with his aggression, his mother was drunk, his father was drunk...'* Participant E1 stated that, when she once questioned a learner after a few days of absenteeism, he told her that he had visited his father and that his father had given him beer shandy which they had drunk together.

There are serious social problems related to parental substance abuse (Altshuler & Cleverly-Thomas, 2011:43; Davies, 2010:63). The children of these parents are often exposed to isolation, poverty and parental mental health problems. Parenting is inconsistent, harsh and void of emotional warmth (Lewis, Holmes, Watkins & Mathers, 2015:2398). Children are threatened by exposure to the chemicals involved, they are neglected because the parents' addiction enjoys preference above the children's needs and they are significantly at risk for different forms of abuse (Altshuler & Cleverly-Thomas, 2011:43). The children then have to fend for themselves and they sometimes have to adopt the caregiving role for younger siblings and the parents (Lander, *et al.*, 2013:200). Children may experience serious depression, anxiety, guilt, shame or anger and they may believe that they have played a role in their parents' disorder (Lander, *et al.*, 2013:201). In a study of children 6 months to 8 years old who were removed from drug abusing parents in the USA, the children had deficits in the following areas of development: communication (36%), personal/social skills (30%), both fine motor skills and problem-solving (28%), and gross motor skills (20%). There was also a high percentage of externalizing and internalizing problems (aggressive and withdrawn behaviour) (Altshuler & Cleverly-Thomas, 2011:57). Davies (2010:63) describes other problems related to parental drug abuse that impact negatively on children's academic progress, including frequent absenteeism, anxiety, depression and psychosomatic problems, inconsistent school work and parents who are indifferent and uncooperative towards the child's schooling. These findings are especially significant for the purposes of this study, because all the problems stated above could impact severely on school readiness. The effect that prenatal exposure to alcohol and methamphetamine abuse will have on children, will be discussed in 3.6.3.1.

### **3.7.9 Family violence**

According to the social workers, many parents co-habit without marrying. There are many children who hear their mother accusing the father of being unfaithful. After hearing parents fight all night, children are too tired to concentrate in school (SW2). *'Especially in the substance abuse cases,*

*family violence occurs again, because the child has to listen all night ... how the father breaks down the mother ... say you this and you that and you are a ... you are worthless ... and crushes the mother's self-esteem. This carries on until four o' clock in the morning ... and then the child has to get up and then that child is so tired.'* (SW2). The mothers also confirmed that there is much violence in families in the community. PC3 who remarked that there is a 99% occurrence of violence in the community, said that that includes violence in the homes. *'Ninety-nine per cent any violence, as one would remark, violence in the home...'*

According to Roberts, Campbell, Ferguson and Crusto (2013:605), family violence is often repetitive and on-going in nature, exacerbating the negative effect on the children witnessing the violence. Fantuzzo and Fusco (2007:14) found that the majority of children witnessing family violence were younger than six years. Domestic violence was strongly linked to poverty, but also associated with other risk factors such as single parenthood and ethnic minority status (Fantuzzo & Fusco, 2007:17).

It has been proven beyond doubt that domestic violence negatively impacts on all the domains of children's development. Buchanan, Power and Verity (2014:719, 721) studied the quality of the mother-child-attachment in abusive intimate relationships and found that these mothers and children lived in a sustained atmosphere of hostility, generated by the abuser and that the abusers often sabotaged the mothers' efforts to form an attachment with their children. The mothers' hard work to placate the abusers and protect their babies enjoyed precedence over their ability to build an attachment with the babies. Witnessing family violence traumatizes children, leading to negative emotional and behavioural outcomes, including anxiety, hyperarousal and aggression. Apart from the impact of witnessing the violence, the caregiver who is most often the victim of the abuse, is not emotionally and physically available to soothe and comfort the distressed child, leading to further traumatising (Herman-Smith, 2003:235-236). Witnessing family violence could lead to poorer socialisation, concentration and academic problems, posttraumatic stress and behaviour problems (Chanmugam & Teasley, 2014:196). Witnessing family violence could also lead to a significantly higher incidence of internalizing and externalizing behaviour, especially aggression and hostility, in boys more than in girls (Blair, McFarlane, Nava, Gilroy & Maddoux, 2015:27). Katz (2016:55) studied the effect of non-physical coercive behaviours by perpetrators that usually accompany family violence, such as threats, monitoring, isolation, financial and emotional abuse, and efforts to prevent mothers from spending time with their children. The results revealed that the impact on children's emotional and behavioural development may be as severe as the physical violence, because of the pervasive and everyday nature of these behaviours.

Thus it is evident that, if there is a high incidence of family violence in the two communities which are the context for this research, there will be a number of Grade R learners who will not be school

ready, due to their exposure to this phenomenon. The impact of family violence on school readiness, together with the impact of the other traumatic circumstances in children's early development and school readiness, will be discussed later in the chapter.

### **3.7.10 Family composition and teenage parenting**

Participant PC3 estimated that 30–50% of the parents in the community are single parents. Participant E4 has learners in her class who come from a home where four children come from one father, but they have different mothers. E3 and SW1 indicated that many children are cared for by the grandmothers, and several educators (E1, E2, E3 & E4) added that many fathers are absent from their children's lives. According to E3, this is the reason why many children are cared for by grandmothers. The social workers come across girls who fall pregnant at a young age and the biological fathers refuse to support the mothers or become involved with the babies, with the result that the cycle of poverty is repeated. Many teenagers of fifteen or sixteen become parents without having learnt what it means to be a parent. These young mothers do not even have basic parenting skills and they would not even know what to do if an infant falls and hurts itself (SW1). These teenagers are often the parents of Grade R learners, while they are still so immature themselves (E2), and grandmothers are sometimes too old to take responsibility for the care of the children (E4). Some mothers have 5 children at a young age. The social workers have to deal with young teenage mothers whose own mothers are addicted to alcohol or drugs, so they cannot support the teenage mothers with advice and care (SW3). Babies of these neglectful parents have to learn to fend for themselves. These factors contribute to a lack of school readiness.

Whiteley and Brown (2010:3) and Puckering (2004:42) describe several risk factors associated with teenage pregnancy, which include a lack of nurturing, loving parenting, coming from poor socio-economic circumstances and single parent families, having a family history of alcohol abuse or mental health, living in high-risk communities, having been sexually abused, poor parental supervision, engaging in risk behaviours such as illicit drug taking, delinquency and dropping out of school, as well as low self-esteem and low perceived life chances. There is also a gradual decline in the involvement of the father of the baby (Whiteley & Brown, 2010:3). Many of the risk factors mentioned by these authors, coincide with the problem behaviours related by the professionals and parents in the target communities.

Non-marital childbearing accounts for 58% of all births in South Africa, which is amongst the highest in the world (Nzimande, 2005, as quoted by Department of Social Development, 2012:11). According to Wilkins (2012:vi), growing up outside of a stable marriage has negative implications for these children in several domains of development. It is harmful to their emotional and physical health, their educational and economic outcomes are poorer and their involvement in substance abuse and early sexual activity is higher. With regards to school readiness, children of mothers

younger than 20 years old are cognitively more disadvantaged at school entry than other children (Fomby, James-Hawkins, & Mollborn, 2015:754). Although starting out at birth on a par with other children, the children of teenage mothers fall behind increasingly during the early years, and are significantly below other children in mathematics and verbal achievement by the time that they go to kindergarten (Grade R). This disparity is perhaps mainly due to the parent's persistent low income and lack of resources (Mollborn, Lawrence, James-Hawkins, & Fomby, 2014:1201-1204). The prevalence of developmental delays in the children of teenage parents is confirmed by other researchers (Briceno, De Feyter and Winsler, 2013:431; Strunk, 2008:13). The literature review of this author revealed that the teenage mother's level of education is the main predictor of the baby's life outcomes. When teenage mothers do not resume their education, the probability that the cycle of poverty is perpetuated, increases dramatically.

Strunk (2008:13) postulates that parenting skills training is an urgent necessity for teenagers to become effective parents and this group of parents should be targeted for interventions. Briceno, *et al.* (2013:431) suggest that the attachment between teenage mothers and their children could be an important determinant of the developmental outcomes for the children. This opinion implies that attachment should be one of the goals of a parenting programme when involving teenage parents.

### **3.7.11 Community violence and gangsterism**

The social workers believed that the schools where the programme was going to be presented, are situated in a high crime area with few resources for the social workers to utilise. According to the educators (Participants E1, E3 and E4) the children in the community are very familiar with violence. Participant E4 mentioned that they come and tell at school about shootings and they tell it without any visible show of emotions. For them it is seemingly a way of life and they do not realise that they should not be familiar with such a topic.

The parents confirmed that there is much violence in the community. PC3 commented that they live in a part of the community where they are still privileged - there is 'only' violence in 99% of the community. *'Ninety-nine per cent violence, any violence ...violence outside the home. One cannot really say one is safe outside. This is why I say 99%, because I cannot really think of a lower percentage.'* According to this participant there is 100% violence and extremely serious socio-economic problems in another part of that same community.

According to the parent and social work participants, gangsterism is rife in the community. PC1 commented that the gangsters draw children in, and that children become rebellious against their parents under the influence of the gangsters who sell drugs in front of the school. Older gangsters use younger children to carry drugs for them. The gangsters look out to recruit vulnerable children

coming from problem households. *'They use our children, they actually use those children from homes where there is need.'* This participant told the group how her own son had started becoming rebellious under the influence of the gangster selling drugs in front of the school.

The social workers (SW2, SW3, SW4, SW5) confirmed that gangs are active in the community and that the gangsters encourage children to join the gangs and to pedal drugs for them. One social worker knew of a case of 14- and 15-year-old girls who were influenced by a drug lord to leave school and to move in with him. In spite of the mothers' efforts to get the police to remove the girls from the drug lord's house, nothing happened. In the end the drug lord supported the mother of the 15-year-old and she accepted the situation. Community members tolerate the gangsters, either because they fear them, or because of the benefit from the drug smuggling activities. A social worker alleged that one decent church going lady allows the gangsters to sell drugs from a wendy house in her back yard for they pay her R500 per month. Other community members fear the gangs. There are two rival gangs, the 26's and the 28's who fight over territory. In some households there is one brother who belongs to the 26's and one belongs to the 28's. This is a very dangerous situation for all the members of the household.

One of the social workers described another scenario, namely people have to pay 'tax' or safety money to live in the area. This sometimes amounts to half of their income, but they reason that they will then be safe, because the gang will protect their interests. In spite of this, the daughter of one woman who pays safety money was raped by a gangster. The perception of the community is that the police are scared to act against the gangsters, because the gangsters have connections high up. The gang bosses do not live in the area, but in smart houses in upmarket suburbs. There are rumours that some police officials are corrupt and that they warn the drug sellers when there is going to be a police raid, so that they can move their drug supplies to other areas.

The social workers mentioned that children are sometimes scared of going to school when the gangs are fighting and the bullets are flying. There are children as young as three or four years old who know that they need to fall down flat when the gang shooting starts. This has a huge impact on children, resulting in bedwetting, soiling and concentration problems. The greatest cause of death in the community is by means of a sharp object. The social workers speculated that most children have seen incidents of violence in their home or on the street. One social worker who was recently newly appointed, told the group that he had already seen four incidents in the street where there was an altercation and a knife was drawn – in full view of children coming and going. The children do not find that strange anymore.

### 3.7.12 Resistance to authorities and professional support by parents

There were strong indications that parents in the target communities are suspicious of authority figures and that they lack the incentive to cooperate with professionals for the well-being of their children. According to the educators, parents do not cooperate with the school in the interest of their children and it is often the very learners who battle to make progress, whose parents do not care enough to visit the school (E4). When they are called in because their children have a backlog, they simply do not come (E3). When the educators visited parents at home to discuss their children's problems, the parents resented their presence (E3). E1 commented: *'That parent easily feels why are you trespassing? This is my privacy, this is my environment. Do not just come in and this and this and this ...You know? So that the danger is critical, but then again I think parents would question you on that. Who are you to trespass or to intrude in my privacy, my environment? You know?'* E2 commented that parents' attitude towards the educators has deteriorated. *'Our parents are very arrogant ... and they can offend you (te na kom), because they feel they have many more rights. They know their rights. Do not make a mistake. They can report you at the Department if you just say something wrong. So we are (maar) cautious [versigtig].'*

Signs of animosity were also detected by the social workers. SW2 and SW4 said how parents swear at them in the most abusive language when they question them about their children and other issues (*'...and so I am sworn at in the ugliest manner. Also again 'my child comes from my womb' and 'you social workers' race and such.'* (Translation of: *'En so word ek maar gevloek in die lelikste. Ook weer 'my kind kom uit my dinges uit' en 'julle maatskaplike werkers se kleur en goed.'*).

Resistance to and suspicion of support from professionals are not uncommon in marginalised communities. There may be several reasons for this. In the first place parents may not understand the involvement of social workers, because they do not experience that they are lacking in anything. Holland, Forrester, Williams and Copello (2014:1496-1499) found in their interviews with parents whose children had been removed due to their substance abuse, that the parents did not agree that they had been inadequate parents, in spite of acknowledgements from some of them that there had been domestic violence and child neglect and abuse. They gave accounts of 'good enough' parenting, providing food and keeping the children clean, and they felt that the authorities' concerns about them had been misplaced. Furthermore, parents may have had adverse experience with people who embody authority. Becci, Brook and Lloyd (2015:86) found that social workers (case managers) and court officials in one study had extremely negative perceptions of substance abusing parents whose children had been removed from their care. Their attitude was described as 'judgmental, shaming, lacking empathy and casting the parents as criminals'. If that is the attitude that parents expect from professionals, it is not surprising that they are antagonistic.

### 3.8 CHALLENGES WITH REGARDS TO CHILDREN

#### 3.8.1 Lack of progress

The educators work with many children who just do not progress and it is not always clear what the reason is, but it is evident that the child cannot do mathematics, or he works very slowly. Sometimes the lack of progress can be ascribed to the fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). E1 and E2 stated that they can identify these children by their peculiar facial features. E2 also referred to learners affected by methamphetamine (TIK) abuse by the parents, saying: *'So ... and those TIK babies that appeared now, who are entering Grade R and Grade 1 now, those children are not school ready.'* Their physical appearance is normal, but, once the educators engage with them, they can see the learners are not normal. They work very slowly and the educators then sometimes hear from a relative or from the mother herself that she used drugs while she was pregnant. E5 remarked: *'Those TIK cases, there is not much research on TIK children, so it presents itself in different ways in children, and one guesses, when one comes across such as child and starts to work with him, then one surmises there is a big problem. One cannot pinpoint the problem directly unless someone comes and tells the child has problems. Then one says: 'Ahah, now I understand why the child struggles so much'. E1 told about a learner whose 'pace of work was slow, tremendously slow. And the mom came to me saying that she did things in her pregnancy that obviously affected her child'. One participating parent (PC3) acknowledged that she is the cause of her son's inability to progress academically. 'This is a 'syndrome' child ...I won't argue ... I did wrong things. In the end I often say what we as parents do while we are pregnant, also has consequences at the time when our children go to school.'*

Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) refers to developmental disabilities in a child due to the mother abusing alcohol during her pregnancy (Jooste & Jooste, 2011:420; Lander, Howsare and Byrne, 2013:199). The damage sustained by the child is irreversible and it may include serious intellectual and physical impairment, leading to learning problems at school (Uys, 2011:452; Wheeler, 2010, n.p). The Western Cape is globally amongst the regions with the highest incidence of FASD. In their study of the attitudes of pregnant women who abused alcohol, Watt, Eaton, Dennis, Choi, Kalichman, Donald Skinner and Sikkema (2015:48, 53) found that many women acknowledged that someone had warned them against consuming alcohol while pregnant, but that they had chosen not to heed the warnings. With regards to methamphetamine (TIK), the Journal of Neuroscience reported that scientists, who used structural magnetic resonance imaging (SMRI), discovered that the structural damage to babies' brains through prenatal exposure to TIK, was worse than that of alcohol. Damage to a structure in the brain, the caudate nucleus, responsible for learning, memory, motor development, and punishment and reward, predicted learning and behaviour problems in these children (Wheeler, 2010:n.p.). From the information above, it seems

unlikely that these children will be school ready or able to progress academically. Judging from the account by the focus groups about the prevalence of substance abuse, this predicts serious future problems for the schools in the target communities.

Children affected by prenatal substance abuse, pose a huge challenge for the educators. As far as school readiness is concerned, E2 felt that such children are not school ready. According to E4 they are not in school to learn, because they are too playful and only disrupt the class and keep other learners from working. They cannot pay attention, therefore they shout out remarks and take other learners' stuff. The educators feel that teaching children is different now from what it was like years ago. Even remedial teaching does not improve the children's work (E5). However, there are also many children who are not the victims of substance abuse, but who are also not ready for school.

Family conflict can also have a direct impact on children's school readiness and functioning in school. The information that the social workers provided in this regard was discussed above. Participant E3 remarked that children have no self-esteem and pride and this cannot be taught to them in school. The problem of many learners repeating a year at an early age, was mentioned above. Problems progressing at school is a risk factor for children's resilience. Learning disabilities and developmental delays render children vulnerable, especially when parents and educators view the child as lazy and they do not convey to him the sense that he has intrinsic value that does not depend on his school progress (Kaplan & Owens, 2004:82).

### **3.8.2 Behaviour problems**

All three participant groups believed, that because of the problems in families, children develop behaviour problems. Two social workers (SW4, SW5) mentioned that they have to deal with children who use drugs, who do not attend school, or who are involved in gangsterism. The parents take out their problems on the children and then the children react by acting out behaviour at school and they start to show behaviour problems. Then the parents want the children to be sent away, almost as if they want to get rid of them. When the social workers do group work with the problem behaviour children, the children are very compliant in the groups and the social workers realise the actual problem might lie with the parents and not with the children (SW5).

The participating parents believed that when there are problems in the home, the children develop behaviour problems. PC1 commented that children start to act out when things at home are challenging. They come to school full of anger and become aggressive in school. They listen to their parents swearing, fighting and telling unsavoury stories and they come and repeat these stories and bad language at school. PC2 felt that children who live in homes with abusive, addicted parents do not know a better way of life and they follow their parents' negative example.

*'As for parents who drink, who TIK, who TIK, all those wrong things, that child sees my mother does that ...so for that child it is right. In the end that child does the same, 'what my mother does, because she is my mother and she takes care of me.'* PC3 said when parents are at loggerheads with each other, the child will play them up against each other to get his way. This participant added that parents in that community do not have respect for themselves or for their children. According to PC3 children sometimes learn bad behaviour even when their parents are decent people. She said that parents speak in front of their children (*'Yes, I am going to sue her, I am going to do this or that.'*), then the child repeats this at school (*'Yes, my mother said she is going to sue you mother and your mother cannot say anything.'*). In this way they influence other children to follow their example.

The educators mentioned that children are not being taught values and morals at home (E1) and sometimes parents regard their children as 'cute' when they are actually streetwise in doing wrong things. (E4: *'Some parents come to school, because the child is very 'cute' and then the parent tells that the child is very clever. Then it emerges that the child is clever in the wrong things.'* *Sommige ouers, die kinders kom skool toe, want die kind is baie oulik en dan sê die ouers vir jou my kind is baie slim. Dan is ... die kind is slim in die goed wat hy nie moet doen nie...').* The educators said that they constantly have to deal with behaviour problems. E4 has found that, when children are enrolled in school at a later age and thus they are already older than the rest of the learners, it leads to constant fighting with and bullying of other children. E2 remarked that children are intolerant and aggressive. *'One child bumps against another, then it elicits swearing: "Jou ma se p..." [expletives]. There is nothing like "I am sorry" or "please", ...that is not in them.'* (*Translation of: 'Die een kind stamp net aan die ander, dan's dit: 'Djy, jou ma se p...'. Daar's nie 'ek is jammer' of 'ekskuus' of 'asseblief'. Daai is nie in hulle nie.'*).

The above information indicates that it seems as if the children in the target communities are at risk for a range of problematic behaviour problems. Literature suggests that the quality of parental care, the effect of poverty and related problems as well as the example that parents set, could lead to these problems. The social learning theory that was formulated by psychologist Albert Bandura, was discussed in Chapter 2. Bandura postulated that children learn many behaviour patterns by observing others (Bandura, 1997:22). With regards to anti-social behaviour, Bandura states that vicarious reinforcement or punishment determines the probability of the behaviour being repeated. When acts of aggression are followed by punishment, it acts as a deterrent for the observer. When an aggressor is consistently rewarded, the probability of the observer repeating the aggressive behaviour, increases. In the acclaimed Bobo doll experiment of Bandura, Ross and Ross (1961:581) it was found that, when children observed modelling of aggressive behaviour that was rewarded or where there were no adverse consequences, their levels of aggression increased, in contrast with children who saw the aggression being punished. This was especially true for boys

(Dowling 2014:36). This theory has serious implications for the target communities, considering the multiple problem behaviours described by the focus groups. Unless some degree of intervention takes place, the probability that children will adopt their parents' example is high.

Utting and Pugh (2004:26) quote Farrington (2002) who found that the following family factors at the time when children were eight to ten years old, have played a role later in juvenile delinquency and/or self-reporting offending, namely harsh or inconsistent discipline; parents who were cruel, passive or neglectful; a lack of parental supervision; marital conflict or separation; a family history of criminality; low income family; poor housing and large family size. In their meta-analysis of relevant literature Fearon, Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van Ijzendoorn, Lapsley and Roisman (2010:21) found irrefutable evidence that an insecure attachment plays a strong role in the development of behaviour problems in children and especially in boys. According to Lander, Howsare and Byrne (2013:199) parents who abuse substances, probably cannot form a secure attachment with their children, which could lead to a host of emotional, behavioural and delinquency problems in the children. Shin, Hong and Hazen (2010:232) found that child sexual abuse was associated with multiple-substance abuse in adolescent girls who were receiving social welfare services. On the other hand, Tyrone, Cheng and Lo (2011:1671) did not find an association between child abuse or parental substance abuse and marijuana use amongst adolescents, who received social welfare services. However, they found that a close parent-child-bond, parental monitoring, and adolescent involvement in school activities were protective factors against adolescent use of marijuana.

### **3.8.3 School dropout**

School dropout is a common occurrence in the target communities. SW3 mentioned that thousands of children are not attending school, although, according to the SA Schools Act (South African Schools' Act No. 84 of 1996 chapter 2, section 3) it is the parents' responsibility to ensure that their children of school going age, attend school. Sometimes the parents are not aware that the child is not in school anymore and they find out much later. In one case the social worker went to the parent to inform her that the child had dropped out of school. The parent became abusive and asked the social worker how she dared accuse the child of dropping out (SW3). The social workers (Participants SW3, SW4, SW5) find that children sometimes drop out of school early, because of family conflict. When they have heard their parents fight all night and the father swearing at the mother that she is worthless, they are too tired to concentrate in school. Such children lose hope and they think that they will find the comfort of a family when they join the gangs. These children are a soft target for the gangs to recruit (SW2). *'And many of the children think, oh man, I won't worry, next year I am going to high school, I will not go, I will only go the first month, then I will leave everything. Then I will join the gang. They will be my family and I will have a feeling of belonging.'*

Children who do not attend school anymore are outdoors most of the time. They become bored and then they start to commit crime (SW3). Participant PC1 told of her own son who became involved in drugs and bad friends and dropped out of school. He is now staying at home.

### **3.9 WHAT PARTICIPANTS WANT FROM A PARENTING PROGRAMME**

To the question what the participants would like to see in a parenting programme, the educators and PC3 agreed that parents need to become more involved in their children's lives and spend time with them. Participant PC3 also suggested that parents need to be trained and that parenting programmes need to be fun for parent and child.

- Children need a solid foundation of good values and morals and they need to be taught basic good manners.
- Children need love. Sometimes when an educator gives a child a hug, she can feel the child pulling away. On the other hand, other children are hungry for love and seek touch from educators.
- Parents must be shown how to engage with their children and how to communicate with them.
- A fixed routine at home is important.
- Parents need to be taught to discipline their children, because it makes children feel safe. Children are beaten a lot in these communities. Parents need to be taught a better way of discipline.

Regarding the question of what can be done to improve parenting in order to enhance school readiness, the mothers agreed that parenting workshops are an urgent necessity. Participant PC3 suggested that there must also be more activities at school, such as sports and cultural activities. In order to draw parents, fun activities and fun days with games must be offered. When parents and their children have fun together, the bond between them develops (PC3).

The detrimental effect of multiple socio-economic challenges on child development as described by several researchers internationally (Mistry, *et al.*, 2010:445; Ferguson, *et al.*, 2007:702; Fantuzzo, *et al.*, 2005:582; McLoyd, 1998:185,191; Naudeau, *et al.*, 2011:11) and locally (Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:27; Strydom, 2011:113) were discussed in Chapter 2. From the account given by the focus groups, it seems as if many of these risk factors are found in the target communities. There are, however, indications that family processes can counter the effect of these risk factors (Jackson & Needham, 2014:40; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:187). Numerous studies have revealed that dedicated parents can make a difference to counter the effect of poor socio-economic conditions. Even in adverse circumstances a warm, caring and respectful relationship with an adult, in which children can experience a measure of pleasant interactions, can buffer children

from the effects of adverse influences and form the basis for the development of a positive self-image (Caplan & Owens, 2004:75; O'Campo, Caughy, & Nettles, 2010:1412; Centre for the Developing Child, 2015, n.p.). Martin, *et al.* (2010:152) and Schonkoff and Phillips (2000:6) state that, if the lack of a sensitive caregiving relationship with an adult can be restored, it can foster remarkable recovery. Ramey and Ramey (2004:487) believe that early intervention in the domain of early childhood development is critically important to close the achievement gap between disadvantaged and rich children, because the disparities are already evident before school entry. These authors actually recommend that intensive prevention programmes with a holistic approach should be implemented from infancy, and they feel that the age of 4 is already too late. However, there are other programmes of less intensity and shorter duration that yielded encouraging results. In line with the above viewpoints, E1 stated that parents should not be labelled just because they live in that community, because the parents' involvement with their children plays the critical role in the children's development. Upon being questioned whether a parent in a shack can do all the necessary things with a child to make him school ready, E1 responded with: '*Most definitely. It totally depends on that parent.*'

The above results are good news for the purposes of this study. One program cannot have much of an impact on the serious problems of the two target communities, but it can bring about change and growth to parents of Grade R learners, and ultimately contribute to their school readiness.

### **3.10 CONCLUSION**

This chapter contains the data provided by the three focus groups in the target communities. They provided evidence of parents in the target communities who are stable, caring parents who are responsive to their children's needs and who care much about their education and well-being. On the other hand, much more information was divulged about the serious psychosocial problems in the communities. These included poverty and unemployment, the poor quality of parenting, parents who fail to interact with their children and stimulate their development, parental substance abuse, all forms of child abuse of which neglect is the most prevalent, and family and community violence. These are problems that could have a serious detrimental effect on children's school readiness.

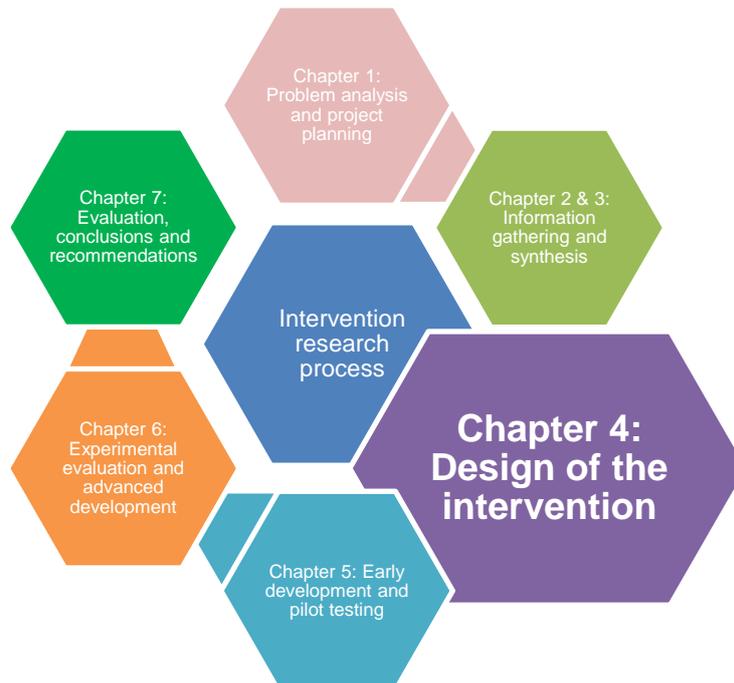
The focus groups further gave information about the problems that they experience with children in the communities, including failure to progress at school, behaviour problems, substance abuse and dropping out of school. The future of these children looks bleak and the probability exists that they will perpetuate the cycle of poverty and hopelessness, unless serious interventions are undertaken.

In the next chapter the role of parents as described in Chapter 2 will be compared to the data provided by the focus groups to identify the components of a parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners.

## CHAPTER 4

### DESIGNING A PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMME TO ENHANCE THE SCHOOL READINESS OF GRADE R LEARNERS

#### Phase 2: Designing the prototype



#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 4 deals with the design and development of the parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners. Phase 2 of the intervention research process entailed three steps:

Step 4: Analyse data obtained during phase 1

Step 5: Determine procedural elements of prototype

Step 6: Develop prototype based on the information gathered

This process answers the main research question: What would the components be of a parenting skills programme aimed at enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners in resource-poor communities?

## 4.2 ANALYSIS OF THE DATA GATHERED DURING PHASE 1

The importance of acknowledging parents as key role players in their children's early development and including them in any early development programmes is widely accepted in literature (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:245; Pitt, 2013:10). This has led to wide funding by several western governments of programmes in which children are included with their parents (Jackson & Needham, 2014:39). Pitt, *et al.* (2013:10) suggest that, when parents are empowered to understand the developmental milestones that their children need to master *before* entry into the schooling system, they would be better prepared to provide in their children's needs throughout their school career. Mukherji and Dryden (2014:245) stress the importance of working partnerships with parents in early childhood settings. Parents are regarded as their children's first educators and children progress better in school when their parents are involved.

### 4.2.1 School readiness

With regards to school readiness, the following information emerged from the focus group discussions (as discussed fully in the previous chapter):

- Many children entering the school system are not school ready (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5).
- Learners who enter Grade 1 without the necessary school readiness skills do not catch up, but fall further behind and they have to repeat grades (E3, E4, E5). This fact is supported in literature.
- Parents play a pivotal role in their children's school readiness (PC1, PC3, E4).
- Parents are unaware of the requirements of school readiness, of their important role in school readiness and how they can support their Grade R children in becoming ready for school (PC1, PC2, PC3, PC4, E1, E2, E3, E5).

### 4.2.2 Problems identified in the areas of social and emotional school readiness

The participants indicated that many learners entering Grade 1 are not school ready in both the social and emotional domains of development. The following are the problems that could seriously impact on children's school readiness that emerged from the focus group discussions and the discussion group:

- Inability of parents to build warm, supportive relationships with their children (all the participants);
- Learners affected by prenatal exposure to substances (PC1, E1, E2, E4, E5);
- Problems with children separating from a parent and crying all day (E1);
- Poor emotion regulation by learners and parents (PC1, PC2, E4, SW4, SW5);
- Low self-esteem of learners due to how parents treat them (E3, SW3);
- Lack of routine and discipline (E2);

- Poor behaviour regulation (SW4, SW5, PC1, PC2, E4);
- Lack of social skills (E2, E4, PC3);
- Poor principles and values (E1, E4) that are also displayed by parents (E1, E4, SW2, SW3);
- Exposure to traumatic circumstances, including child abuse, parental substance abuse, violence in the home and community, and death (all the participants).

### **4.3 COMPONENTS OF THE PARENTING PROGRAMME**

In selecting topics for the parenting programme, an analysis of the data on the role of parents in the school readiness of Grade R learners, provided by the participants in the focus groups were compared to the literature study. With the focus on social and emotional school readiness skills, the following components were identified and incorporated into the parenting programme:

#### **4.3.1 Component 1: Parent-child relationships**

Topic 1: The five love languages

#### **4.3.2 Component 2: Social and emotional school readiness**

With regards to emotional school readiness, the following eight topics were identified:

Topic 2: Building children's self-esteem

Topic 3: Positive discipline

Topic 4: Emotion regulation

Topic 5: Self-control and delayed gratification

Topic 6: Social Development

Topic 7: Identity development

Topic 8: Moral development

Topic 9: Play

#### **4.3.3 Component 3: Building resilience**

The vital need for the children and their parents living in the target communities to build resilience, emerged from the data during phase one of the process. The following topics were added to achieve this goal:

Topic 10: Humour and fun

Topic 11: Positive thinking

Topic 12: Parent wellness.

## **4.4 PRINCIPLES OF THE PROGRAMME**

The following principles were applied in structuring the programme:

### **4.4.1 Engaging parents and their Grade R children together in the programme**

After studying the literature with regards to parenting programmes, the researcher decided to utilize the concept of engaging parents together with their Grade R children in the activities. Although there are many parenting programs, few of them include the children in the programme. The concept of including parents and children was found in the literature on 'supported playgroups' in Australia and, 'Stay and Play'-groups in England, where practitioners work with parents and their young children together (Jackson & Needham, 2014:37). Nabuco, Aguiar, Costa and Morais (2014:566) found that preschoolers made significant gains in several developmental areas when they and their parents interacted together in a programme. The concept of including parents and their children is also used in Parent-Child Interaction Therapy, where parents received live coaching in play activities with their children, to strengthen the parent-child bond and to coach parents to apply behaviour management techniques (Lanier, Kohl, Benz, Swinger & Drake, 2014:450). Another study yielded positive gains in toddlers' peer interactions when parents not only listened to a theoretical lecture, but received hands-on training while in interaction with their children (Christopher, Saunders, Jacobvitz, Burton & Hazen, 2013:776). A meta-analysis of successful versus unsuccessful parenting programmes by the US Department of Health and Human Services (2009:5) revealed that 'requiring parents to practice with their child during programme sessions', was one of the factors that distinguished successful programmes from less successful programmes. Building on Vygotsky's theory that learning takes place through participating in activities with others (Galotti, 2011:27), this concept could be regarded as a learning curve for children and their parents. In a meta-analysis of research on parenting programmes, Rossi (2009:5) found that the more successful programmes had three characteristics in common, of which one was that parents were given the opportunity to practise the skills taught to them with their own children during training sessions.

### **4.4.2 Strength based approach**

During the focus group discussion with the parents and professionals, it emerged that there are many dedicated, able parents in the target communities who will sacrifice their own interests to promote their children's well-being. The researcher decided to use the strength based approach to design the parenting programme. This decision was partly based on the strength based approach as described by Condrat (2014:39 and Teater (2014:44), with the premise that the parents attending the programme possessed the potential to be competent parents, and that focusing on their strengths instead of on their deficits would empower and encourage them to grow into and flourish in their parenting role. This approach is in line with the White Paper on Families (DSD, 2013:9) that states that families have inherent fortes and competencies that enable them to

weather adversity, and that these need to be taken into account when interventions are done with a family level. Jackson and Needham (2014:41) caution against a deficit model where parents will be stigmatized as 'at risk' or 'vulnerable'. If the programme was to succeed, parents needed to feel competent and be acknowledged in their role as parents.

#### **4.4.3 Parenting role**

The researcher aimed at supporting parents to become excellent at being parents and not for the parents to usurp the role of Grade R educators. The researcher went out from the premise that the role of parents is different from that of educators and that the roles are complementary. The information and activities were therefore directed at empowering parents to enhance the three mechanisms through which they exercise an influence on their children's academic progress, as proposed by Waldfogel and Washbrook (2008) in Mukherji and Dryden (2014:245):

- The quality of the parent-child attachment;
- The style of parenting that parents adopt;
- The learning environment that parents create in their home.

#### **4.4.4 Interaction and enjoyment**

Puckering (2004:41) cites several studies stating that parents who parent in adverse socio-economic circumstances, display a lack of enjoyment in their children and often do not know how to respond more sensitively towards their children. One of the assumptions that the program was based on, was that, if parents and children experienced pleasant interactions together, it would strengthen the bond between them and that learning would take place. Harman, O'Connor and Guilfoyle (2014:132) describe the aims of supported playgroups in Australia as 'encouraging parents, or regular caregivers, and their children to play and have fun together in a safe and stimulating environment, to promote the importance of parents' awareness of their child's developmental needs, and to assist parents to develop support networks'.

#### **4.4.5 Parent wellness**

Parents who parent in challenging circumstances need support to enhance their own emotional wellness. Only when parents are emotionally healthy and feel confident about their parenting abilities, can they function optimally as parents. When the contrary is true, they are less able to give their children quality care (Roberts, 2009:11 as quoted by Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:192). A secondary aim of the programme that originated from the data collected during the literature study and focus group discussions, was to support parents emotionally and to build their self-esteem and confidence as parents.

## 4.5 DISCUSSION OF THE COMPONENTS OF THE PROGRAMME

### Component 1: Parent-child relationship

#### 4.5.1 Topic 1: The five love languages

##### 4.5.1.1 Rationale for selecting this topic

The inability of many parents to forge strong emotional bonds with their children, was evident in the accounts of all the participants in the focus groups. The social workers felt that many teenage parents were not ready to be parents and they did not always have the support of their own parents, who were sometimes substance abusers (MW3). Parents who abused substances were not interested in their children (PC1, PC2, PC3, PC4). Neglect was common and some learners came to school in an unwashed and neglected state (E2, E3, MW1, MW2, MW3, MW4, MW5). Many parents did not understand the concept of building a bond with their children (educators and MW1, MW2, MW4). For some parents, it is enough that they had carried their babies for nine months and had given birth to them. They do not think that they had parental responsibilities other than occasionally washing and feeding their children (MW1). When the social workers spoke to these parents about loving their children, it seemed as if they did not realise that feelings were part of the equation. These parents do not attach value to building a relationship with their children and do not make time to talk to them. This causes children not to want to spend time at home. (SW5).

##### 4.5.1.2 Theoretical framework

Consistently throughout the literature study the influence of attachment, or the close emotional bond between parents and children, on all the developmental domains of young children and thus also on school readiness, is described. Optimal cognitive, behavioural, social and emotional development of preschoolers is promoted by the warmth, responsivity and stimulating behaviours provided by a mother (Bernier, *et al.*, 2010:326; Davies, 2011:9; Eshel, *et al.*, 2006:992; Gerhardt, 2009:2; Martin, *et al.*, 2010:146; Pitt, *et al.*, 2013:3).

Building on the attachment theory of Bowlby (1969:246), Ainsworth (1985:771, 773) came to the conclusion that the regularity with which parents respond to their babies' needs and interact with the babies, creates within the babies expectations of the relationship. These expectations later form 'working models' or representational models in the babies of their world, their relationships and eventually of themselves. The researcher postulated that many parents' own internal working model of attachment could be deficient and that they lacked a healthy representational model of relationships to repeat, when interacting with their own children. When parents fail to forge a secure attachment with their children, it could seriously compromise the children's social and emotional school readiness. Without at least one such relationship, development is disrupted and the consequences can be severe and long lasting. If provided or restored, however, a sensitive caregiving relationship can foster remarkable recovery (Centre on the Developing Child, 2016;

Martin, *et al.*, 2010:152; Schonkoff & Phillips, 2000:6). Dowling (2014:93) quotes Davids and Gooch (2003) who state that a positive, supportive bond between parents and children make children resilient against stress. The first and most important component for the proposed parenting programme was thus identified as guiding parents to build a supportive, caring relationship with their Grade R children, by providing practical ways in which they could establish reciprocal loving interactions.

Building parent-child relationships was regarded as the overall aim of the programme, since it touched all the domains of school readiness. To teach parents in a practical way to demonstrate love to their children, the researcher decided on two strategies. The first strategy would be the first topic that provided practical advice on how parents could build a relationship with their children. The second strategy would be to structure the whole programme in a way that parents and their Grade R children interacted and participated in activities, art, games and educational exercises together. The aim of including the children with the parents in the sessions, was to provide parents with ideas and opportunities to have enjoyable times with their children and learn from other parents. E1 recommended that parents should be taught to engage with their children.

Sharing with parents the content of the Five Love Languages for Children by Chapman and Campbell (2015, video), the researcher explained to them how babies need their parents to provide in all their needs, and how parental responsivity shapes the internal working model of attachment that ultimately impacts on all children's future relationships. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the importance of responsivity by the parent and the reciprocity of the relationship, based on the serve and return model (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011, n.p.; National Scientific Council on the Developing child, 2004:1) was explained to the parents. The researcher then explained that young (and older) children also need parents to physically and tangibly demonstrate their love for their children. Although children prefer one love language, all love languages are actually applicable to all children. Children have a love tank that parents need to keep filled. If children's love tank is empty, they might look for love in the wrong places when they are older. Most parents love their children, but there is no way that children can know this if parents do not demonstrate it. That can be done in the following ways:

#### *Physical touch*

Touch has emotional power and it is a powerful communicator of love to children. Babies who are picked up, fondled and held, are aware of it long before they experience it consciously. Older children also need touch in the form of hugs, kisses, high fives and wrestling on the floor. It is also important that fathers do not withdraw from their pre-teen daughters, but that they should hug them.

At birth babies' sense of touch is highly developed and sensitive to the environment (Du Plessis, 2014:17; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:159). Closeness and touch promote healthy physical and emotional development. Touch promotes relationships between babies and the people around them, body awareness, motor planning, language development, fine motor development, visual perception and cognitive development (Du Plessis, 2014:18). Parental touch is not only important for babies, but for children of all ages. In the research of Takeuchi, Miyaoka, Tomoda, Suzuki, Liu, and Kitamura, (2010:113) it emerged that students of between 18 and 46 years old, remembered parental touch when they were young children as a reflection of their parents' love, which provided them with feelings of safety and protection. The prevalence of depression in these students was correlated with low incidence of parental touch when they were young. Studies by Reece, Ebstein, Cheng, Ng and Schirmer (2016:137,138) and Brauer, Xiao, Poulain, Friederic, and Schirmer (2016:6) showed a correlation between the frequency of maternal touch and enhanced social development in pre-schoolers. These findings suggest that through touch parents can lay the foundation for their children to build and maintain social relationships (Reece, *et al.*, 2016:139). These findings have important implications for this study and point to the positive way in which parental touch can impact Grade R children's social school readiness.

#### *Words of affirmation*

Words of affirmation can include

- words of affection, focusing on the child's appearance or characteristics (lovely smile, strong, smart and 'I love you');
- words of praise for a child's efforts. Do not only praise perfection, otherwise the child might get the perception that he must always achieve something to satisfy the parent); and
- words of encouragement that could motivate the child to do more ('I appreciate this or that').

The parents should try to look out for characteristics that they want to build into their children's character and praise those. When using the phrase 'I love you', which is still the most powerful phrase, it should stand alone and not be accompanied by a request or an instruction. The phrase needs to stand alone and be unconditional in all circumstances, even in difficult times. In this way children will know that their parents' love is unconditional and not tied to obedience or other requirements. This will encourage children to go to their parents in times of trouble and not turn to someone outside of the family.

According to Bergin and Bergin (2008:143) warm, positive words from parents contribute to a secure attachment between parent and child. Smith and Mack (2006:38) discuss four different kinds of words of which the 'Intentionally Inviting' kind reflects unconditional acceptance and respect for the self and others ('You have done a really good job looking after your brother'). Such words convey the message that people are valued and worthwhile, which lays the foundation for a

healthy, well-functioning self-concept. On the other hand, these authors confirm the damage caused by derogatory remarks to children. When children hear remarks such as: 'You are no good just like your daddy', 'You will never be anything', or 'You are so dumb', during the early years when the self is still emerging, they could internalize and actualize it. Smith and Mack (2006:39) quote Kelly (1962:15) who remarked 'the self feeds on ideas ... which come from other people'. Words have the power to build people (children) up or break them down, create hope or despair or make them believe that they can achieve great things or nothing (Smith & Mack, 2006:42).

### *Quality time*

Children desperately need quality time with their parents and that means having the parents' undivided attention. Parents need to step onto the level of the child, because the child cannot reach up to the parent's level. That means that parents need to sit on the floor and play with their children and not answer the phone when it rings. The undivided attention is more important than the activity that the parent and child do together. With adolescents it is more complicated, and parents might need to get into teenage music or whatever the teenager is interested in. Examples of activities with young children is conversation and storytelling (own true stories of when the parent was little, made up stories, Bible stories).

The quality and quantity of time that parents spend with their children convey to them the value that the parents attach to them. Few things express value as loudly as just being available (Direnfeld, 2003:73). Apart from the possible emotional benefits that quality time with parents holds for children, children's academic outcomes could be impacted by the amount of quality time that they enjoy with their parents. Price (2008:240) discusses several studies finding that the outcomes for first-born children are better than for younger children or children in large families in terms of educational outcomes and risk behaviour. His own research revealed that parents spend in total, thousands of hours more quality time with first-born children than with subsequent children. This could be a plausible explanation for the results discussed above. Quality time could therefore contribute to children's school readiness and should be encouraged. Heiland, Price and Wilson (2014:2,14) calculated that, when mothers in the USA entered the labour market full-time, there was a reduction of about 40% in quality time that these mothers spent with their children. Quality time was regarded as time that mothers interacted with their children in an activity. These researchers argue that it is the mother-child activities that contribute most to cognitive development, including reading, that are affected the most. This finding corresponds with the remark of educator E3 in the focus group that children are not stimulated at home, because some parents work such long hours that they do not have the time to read to their children and engage in other activities. It seems as if a lack of quality time could seriously impact on children's school readiness.

### *Gifts*

The word 'gift' comes from the Greek word grace, meaning unmerited favour. Gift giving is a token of love in all cultures and is a powerful communicator. A gift says 'I was thinking of you'. Parents give their children many gifts that are not acknowledged, such as buying them clothes and supplies for school. They could just as well gift wrap it and hand it over as gifts, so that children can realise that receiving what they need can also be regarded as gifts. The researcher suggested to parents in the parenting programme that giving a small gift such as a chocolate occasionally and the parent telling the child that she thought of the child while she was shopping, would convey to the child the idea that the parent thought of the child even when they were not together.

### *Acts of service*

From the time of children's birth, parents perform acts of service to care for them and nurture them. Acts of service need to be age appropriate. A parent can feed a baby, but not a six-year-old child. As children mature, parents need to teach them to become independent by doing more and more for themselves. Because it is sometimes more trouble teaching a child to make his own bed, the parents can easily continue doing that for the child, thereby depriving the child from learning to care for himself. Supporting children to become self-sufficient is acts of service. In the process children need to be taught to make decisions and given options that they have to choose from. They also need to be taught the consequences of their actions, which is a handy way of teaching them to obey.

The researcher suggested to parents that an act of service could be like a treat now and again, such as breakfast in bed during the holiday or a glass of cool drink when the child is studying. In other words, giving a little extra. This does not mean that children should be absolved from their own household chores and that parents need to be their children's servants.

## **Component 2: Social and emotional school readiness**

### **4.5.2 Topic 2: Building my child's self-esteem**

#### *4.5.2.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

In order to develop optimally and thrive in school, children need to possess a healthy self-esteem (Berk, 2006:458, in De Witt, 2016:126; Brennand, Hall, Fairclough, Nicholson & Rees, 2001:338; Thompson & Goodman, M. 2009:150). The focus group participants remarked that children's self-esteem in the target communities are profoundly affected by the way that their parents treat them. Coming to school dirty and neglected (E2 & E3), being badly beaten (E3), and being sexually abused (SW3), are some of the traumatic happenings that break down their self-esteem. This corresponds with Hildyard and Wolfe (2002:684) who state that 'the unresponsive, insensitive, or traumatizing care' that neglected children experience, often leaves them with an image of themselves as not worthy of love and viewing other people as unavailable or rejecting. Children

need good self-esteem to learn. When children have high self-esteem, they feel secure about their worth as a human being and satisfied with themselves and their various attributes (De Witt, 2016:126). The WHO (2000:13) quotes Erikson (1994) who postulated that high self-esteem protects children against feelings of hopelessness and emotional distress. It enables them to cope with challenges and stress. For children growing up in the challenging circumstances of the target communities, positive self-esteem therefore is a prerequisite for healthy development and school readiness. Without positive self-esteem and motivation, children will have difficulty to apply themselves to classroom activities and to learn the many new tasks required of them when they enter Grade 1. The A PAR parenting programme for parents and their children in Portugal produced significant gains in the children's self-esteem through stories, through 'learning by doing' and through the praise and encouragement that they received for their efforts (Nabuco, *et al.*, 2014:566).

#### 4.5.2.2 Theoretical framework

##### **Description of concepts**

**Self-concept** is the total image that children have of their characteristics and abilities. Once babies recognise that they are separate from others, self-concept starts to develop (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:302; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:480,487). Young children's description of themselves is in concrete terms and is mostly highly inflated. By the time that they are about six years old, their self-description becomes more complex and they start to draw connections between different aspects of themselves, but their description of themselves is still essentially in absolute terms, in other words it is either good or it is no good.

**Self-esteem** is the evaluative aspect of the self (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:487), the assessment of their self-worth (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:303). Self-esteem is described as 'a feeling of self-appreciation' (Hosogi, Okada, Fujii, Noguchi, & Watanabe, 2012:2) or as the relatively consistent positive feelings that a person has about himself (De Witt, 2016:126). When children have high self-esteem, they feel secure about their worth as a human being and they are satisfied with themselves and their various attributes (De Witt, 2016:126). Self-esteem is distinct from self-concept and is based on children's assessment of the characteristics of their self-concept (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:487). Positive self-esteem is vitally important for children's overall well-being and development. Children with low self-esteem are at risk of developing psychological and social problems (Hosogi, *et al.*, 2012:5). Children with self-esteem that has been damaged by adverse circumstances, are at risk of developing psychological and social problems, which hinders recovery from low self-esteem (Hosogi, *et al.*, 2012:3). McLeod (2012:n.p.) cautions that very low or very high self-esteem can be harmful to a person, and that self-esteem in the middle range is the most beneficial. According to this author people with high self-esteem focus on improvement and growth whereas people with low self-esteem concentrate on not making mistakes.

**Self-efficacy** is the confidence or assurance children have that they will succeed in challenges and achieve their goals (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:33). Self-efficacy determines a child's motivation to participate in a task, work hard and persevere when faced with difficulties (Bameri & Jenaabadi, 2015:88; Schunk & Pajares, 2002, 4-5). Shaffer and Kipp (2010:495) speak of achievement motivation, denoting children's willingness to tackle challenges and accomplish high standards of achievement. Another related concept is school engagement (Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004:60), which contains the following elements:

- behavioural engagement, indicating participation and involvement in class and school activities;
- emotional engagement, which denotes a positive or negative experience of educators, classmates, school work and school, and is presumed to play a role in bonding with the school and willingness to work;
- cognitive engagement, referring to thoughtfulness and willingness to invest the energy and effort necessary to master complex ideas and skills.

O'Farrell and Morrison (2003:68) studied the factors at play in school bonding and found that, in a sample of Grade 4-6 learners, their bonding with their school was partly due to the value that they attached to education, which was impacted by the importance that their parents placed on their educational future. This finding suggests that the attitude of parents towards their children's school progress, plays a role in Grade R children's preparedness to commit themselves to participation and perseverance in class activities.

### ***Home influences impacting on the development of self-esteem***

Although Erikson's theory of psychosocial development suggests that self-esteem develops during the phase of industry versus inferiority between 6 and 12 years of age (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:394), there are theorists who believe that a rudimentary sense of worthiness or unworthiness already exists in preschool children (Verschueren, Buyc, & Marcoen, 2001:126). This indicates that self-esteem emerges while children are still mostly in the care of their parents and other caregivers.

*Parenting style:* Literature suggests that parenting style plays a strong role in the development of self-esteem in children. Children who have a secure attachment to their parents, are likely to have high self-esteem and display curiosity to learn when they enter the school system (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:497). There is general consensus that an authoritative parenting style, with great warmth and responsiveness and high demandingness/discipline, contributes to high self-esteem. Driscoll (2013:23) studied parenting styles and self-esteem over the age spectrum, and found that at all ages children with authoritative parents had higher self-esteem than children with authoritarian parents. As parents became more lenient with their children of 14 years and older, the children's self-esteem increased. Warm responsive parenting is associated with the development of positive

self-esteem (Pinto, *et al.*, 2015:592; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:487) as well as with achievement motivation (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:498). In a Belgian study by Verschueren and Marcoen (1999:196) of five-year-old children's perception of self and attachment to parents, it was found that the preschoolers' positiveness about the self was significantly linked to a secure mother-child attachment, while these children's socioemotional development was positively linked to a secure attachment to the father. The results were highest for children who had a secure attachment with both parents, average for children with conflicting attachments and lowest for children who had an insecure attachment with both parents. A follow-up study of these children when they were eight years old revealed that children who could report positively about themselves at five years old, were regarded by their educators as better adjusted and more autonomous, as well as better liked by their peers. These children also gave a positive report about themselves in several areas. DeHart, Pelham and Tennen (2006:1) make a distinction between implicit (unconscious, moderately uncontrolled) and explicit (consciously considered and moderately controlled) self-esteem. They found in three separate studies that young adults with high implicit and explicit self-esteem reported high incidence of nurturing parenting (DeHart, *et al.*, 2006:8, 12). Parental overprotectiveness was associated with low implicit self-esteem, and permissiveness with low explicit self-esteem, possibly because children could regard parental permissiveness as a lack of caring (Participant PC12).

With regards to self-efficacy, Martorell, *et al.* (2014:33) comment that children learn to judge their own behaviour from the feedback that they receive from others and they gradually learn to select appropriate behaviour modelled on the example of others. Parents who are quick to praise their children's achievements, encourage independence through scaffolding tasks for younger children and set appropriate standards and limits to contribute to the development of achievement motivation (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:498). Dotterer, Lowe, and McHale (2013:744) found that, when parents received assistance to change their parenting style, increased parental warmth and support were linked to an increase in adolescents' school bonding, school self-esteem and academic performance, whereas an escalation in parent-child conflict had the opposite results.

On the other hand, low self-esteem is associated with harsh discipline and withholding of parental love (McLeod, 2012:n.p.). Mogonea and Mogonea, 2013:192 found that when parents of adolescent learners received counselling to change their parenting style to an authoritative style, the self-esteem and school results of their adolescent learners improved. In contrast, the indifference of parents with a permissive style of parenting lead to low self-trust as well as poor motivation, task involvement and responsibility in learners. According to McLeod (2012:n.p) low self-esteem can have dire consequences for children. Such children typically rely on unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as lying, cheating, bullying or avoidance. They may interpret a neutral remark as criticism, they believe that they are only of value when they achieve something, they

avoid exploring new things, their fear of failure may cause them to give up easily and they may give in to peer pressure. Hosogi, *et al.* (2012:3) quotes Coopersmith (1967) who already concluded five decades ago that the parents of children with low self-esteem, showed little concern for their children and offered them an environment that was physically, emotionally and intellectually impoverished, and they themselves typically have low self-esteem and were emotionally unstable.

Shaffer and Kipp (2010:491) caution that the available research of parenting styles and self-esteem do not prove conclusively that parenting styles play a causal role, only that there is a correlation. However, these authors comment that it is not difficult to imagine that warm, supportive comments from parents are apt to promote their children's self-esteem. Shaffer and Kipp (2010:497) describe other home factors playing a role in the development of self-esteem:

*Home environment:* When parents create a stimulating home environment, they encourage their children to explore, develop different skills, and tackle challenges. This promotes an 'intrinsic orientation to achievement', which is an eagerness to strive to achieve personal goals.

*Independence:* Children's efforts to become autonomous should be warmly encouraged. Parents can promote independence by carefully scaffolding age appropriate tasks with their children. They should praise any efforts and guard against being critical of occasional mistakes.

### **Tips for parents to build their children's self-esteem**

- Unconditional love and acceptance that is demonstrated (WHO, 2000:13);
- Praise when children achieve something – 'You did a good job helping your brother ...' (Hildebrand, 1990:302-303; Brennand, *et al.*, 2001:339). Parents should be specific when handing out praise and guard against indiscriminately praising everything. When children then fail at something, they might interpret it as a sign that they are deficient (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:304);
- Encouragement of autonomy and mastery, these are building blocks of self-esteem in young children (WHO, 2000:13), allowing mistakes without criticizing (Brennand, *et al.*, 2001:339);
- Encouragement to explore and achieve – 'Would you like to try this?' (Hildebrand, 1990:302-303);
- Positive life experiences (WHO, 2000:13), creating a positive atmosphere in the home by laughing together (Brennand, *et al.*, 2001:339);
- When discipline needs to be applied, separate the unacceptable behaviour from the child (Hildebrand, 1990:303);
- Create many opportunities for children to mix with other children and build friendships (Brennand, *et al.*, 2001:339);

- Provide a stimulating home environment with play opportunities and resources, including games that encourage imaginative role play and expression of emotions (Brennand, *et al.*, 2001:339);
- Avoid constant pressuring of children to do better (WHO, 2000:13) and keep the child's age and abilities in mind (Brennand, *et al.*, 2001:339);
- Avoid comparisons (Hildebrand, 1990:303), labelling and stereotyping (Brennand, *et al.*, 2001:339);
- Give children choices wherever possible (Hildebrand, 1990:303).

## **Component 2: Social and emotional development**

### **4.5.3 Topic 3: Positive discipline**

#### *4.5.3.1 Rationale for selecting this topic:*

Positive discipline was identified as one of the needs in the target communities. As discussed in the previous chapter, all three participant groups believed that, as a result of the problems in families, children develop behaviour problems. The social workers (SW4 & SW5) mentioned that they regularly deal with parents who request support because of their children's behaviour problems which the parents cannot deal with. The schools also refer children who have been expelled, to the social workers (SW4). The parents believed that, when there are problems in the home, the children develop behaviour problems. According to the educators, children enter the school system without discipline and then they find it hard to adhere to instructions. E3 mentioned that discipline should be included in a parenting programme because it makes children feel safe. Two characteristics of parenting found in the target communities, were harsh discipline, including beating children, and a lack of warmth and affection. Pinderhughes, Dodge, Zelli, Bates, and Pettit (2000:n.p.) found that, because of elevated levels of stress as well as strong beliefs about the value of spanking, low-income parents tended to favour spanking as well as physical power to resolve conflict situations between parents and children, as well as amongst children. In this regard, literature abounds with research, indicating that the outcomes of harsh discipline are not beneficial to children and to school readiness. Choe, Olson and Sameroff (2013:2036) found that mothers' endorsement of physical discipline lead to externalizing problems in preschoolers, whereas inductive discipline was associated with less externalizing problems. Inductive discipline was regarded as discussion of parents with children, and pointing out to them the rules that were transgressed. In an earlier study by Chang, Olson, Sameroff and Sexton (2011:790) found that frequent corporal punishment and low parental warmth and responsiveness with three-year-old boys, predicted an increase in behaviour problems three years later, when they were in kindergarten (Grade R). It was also found that there was a cycle of a mother beating a child, who then responded with acting-out behaviour, which in turn elicited more physical punishment from the mother.

The challenge for the researcher was to persuade the participating parents that corporal punishment does not yield the results that they wish for their children, and to present to them viable alternatives.

#### 4.5.3.2 *Theoretical framework*

##### **Description of positive discipline**

The term discipline comes from the Latin word 'discipulus' which means disciple or follower. This suggests that discipline entails being a good role model for a child to follow. Discipline does not only include punishment when they transgress, but providing patient guidance and giving approval and praise when they behave appropriately (De Witt, 2016:201). Disciplining children is integral to parents' role of socializing their children and teaching them self-control and acceptable behaviour (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:320). The ultimate goal of discipline is to guide children to achieve voluntary self-discipline and self-control (De Witt, 2016:203). The process of discipline is a process of gradually giving children the opportunity to take responsibility for their choices and behaviour and exercising self-control. As young children are allowed to prove themselves and to take initiative in making choices, their self-respect and self-confidence grows (De Witt, 2016:203).

##### **Benefits of discipline**

- Discipline makes children feel secure because they have certainty about what they may and may not do (De Witt, 2016:203, Participant E3).
- Discipline teaches children to behave in a socially acceptable manner. This prevents them from suffering prejudice due to unacceptable behaviour.
- Through discipline children learn to behave in a way that earns them approval and makes them feel accepted and content.
- Discipline helps children to develop self-discipline, self-control and independent decision making.
- Acceptable behaviour boosts children's ego and reinforces acceptable behaviour (De Witt, 2016:203).

##### **Parenting styles related to discipline**

Together with genetic inheritance good parenting places children on the road to optimal mental and physical well-being. The reality is that the concept of 'good' parenting differs greatly. Parenting styles as described by Baumrind (1967, 1997) in Mitchell and Ziegler (2013:232-234) and Martorell, *et al.* (2014:324) were discussed in Chapter 2. With regards to discipline, it needs to be repeated that the different styles differ markedly in the way that discipline is applied. The authoritarian parent demands instant obedience, while the authoritative parents exercise democratic discipline by setting firm limits, applauding positive behaviour and discussing rules with

their children. Permissive parents set no limits and make no demands on their children (Santrock, 2014:401).

Children sometimes need to be punished, because they can be wilfully disobedient and they cannot be allowed to be out of control (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:320). However, De Witt (2016:209) cautions that discipline should never satisfy the needs of the parent, but should be applied to effect change. Parents should always stay calm and in control and should never punish in anger. Research has proven that an authoritative parenting style has the best outcomes for children (De Witt, 2016:205; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:325; Duncan, 2011:292). According to research by Chan and Koo (2011:396) authoritative parenting was associated with higher self-esteem, subjective well-being, less risk behaviours such as smoking, involvement in fights and having friends that use substances, as well as better school results and staying in school longer. The literature study of Edwards, Sheridan and Knoche (2008:7) revealed that positive interaction of mothers lays the foundation for compliance and self-control in young children and that boundary setting and discipline are not as effective if not accompanied by a loving parent-child relationship. Inductive discipline is in line with an authoritative parenting style and includes limit setting, discussing with children the logical consequences of their behaviour and how the undesirable behaviour makes other people feel, as well as getting children's idea of what is fair (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:320).

#### **Tips for parents regarding discipline in the family setting:**

- Parents should spend quality time with their children every day.
- The parent must be a role model for the behaviour that they want to see in their children and set boundaries, because children feel safe when they know what they may and may not do.
- Start discipline early as children are never too young to be disciplined.
- Use positive reinforcement to encourage desirable behaviour. Reinforcement can be *external* in the form of privileges, a star chart or an outing, or *internal* in the form of praise, a smile or a pat on the shoulder (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:320). Parents should describe the behaviour that is praised, because it teaches children what they can do to receive praise.
- When punishment is handed out, it should fit the seriousness of the crime as well as the age of the child.
- Allow the child to sometimes take the consequences of bad behaviour – if you don't want to eat, you will go hungry; no in between food; 'time-out' – one minute for each year of the child's age – can be used with smaller children.
- Children's self-esteem should never be broken down by labelling, shouting, swearing, threatening, using sarcasm, belittling or withholding love. Parents should explain to the child how the behaviour makes them feel.
- Be consistent, what is wrong today is wrong tomorrow.

- Never reject the child. The child must know he is being punished for the crime and not for who he is.
- Give a warning in a strict voice and state the behaviour and the consequence before punishing.
- Ignore a child when he is behaving badly to get attention.
- Never make empty threats and always apply what is promised – the same as with good promises – otherwise children will not take the parent seriously (researcher's own advice).
- Individualise – take the child's needs into account.
- Discipline should be discussed with children to ensure that they understand that disciplining children is serious business. The parent's body language should convey to the child the seriousness of the wrongdoing (De Witt, 2016:208-209).

## **Component 2: Social and emotional development of children**

### **4.5.4 Topic 4: How to help my child deal with feelings.**

#### *4.5.4.1 Rationale for the topic*

Emotional readiness is one of the crucial domains of development that determine whether Grade R learners are school ready or not (Barbarin, *et al.*, 2008:674; Bruwer, *et al.*, 2014:21; Janus, & Duku, 2007:376; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2014:203; Strydom, 2011:111; Van Zyl & Van Zyl, 2011:13). A comprehensive description of emotional school readiness was provided in Chapter 2. Included in the description is the ability to regulate emotions, which means to be able to understand and control one's own emotions. According to the educators in the focus group, many children enter the school system without the required level of emotional maturity (E1, E2, E3, E4, E5). Numerous other indications of a lack of adequate emotion regulation in the children in the target communities were found in the accounts of the other participants. There were also indications that many parents and community members are not successful at emotion regulation, as witnessed in the accounts of harsh parental discipline, marital conflict and community violence. This is in line with literature, stating that there is more hostility and conflict in disadvantaged families than in other families (Evans & Kim, 2013:43).

If the Grade R learners in these communities enter Grade 1 without the required emotional readiness, it is probable that this could seriously harm their chances of achieving optimum results in their academic progress.

#### *4.5.4.2 Theoretical framework*

##### ***The development of emotion regulation***

One of the fundamental developmental tasks of early childhood is learning to understand and control one's emotions. At the age of five years, Grade R learners already experience a wide

range of emotions, including complex emotions directed towards the self, such as pride, guilt and shame (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014: 306). They can experience conflicting emotions that they do not know how to reconcile with each other – when a five-year-old is angry at her mother, she cannot imagine ever loving her again. Preschoolers can talk about their feelings and understand that emotions can be linked to specific events (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:305). Socialising emotions indicates learning the '*emotional display rules*' specific to the culture that children live in (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:435).

According to Narvaez and Lapsley (2009:261-262), who write from a neurobiological perspective, acquiring emotion regulation is a process that starts neonatally when the foundation of the brain circuitry of the newborn baby is established. This happens through a system of interaction between the baby and caregiver by which the caregiver co-regulates the baby's emotions (Lewis, Amini & Lannon, 2000:84 as cited by Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009:261-262). Other authors agree that early parenting and the quality of the parent-child relationship lay the foundation for the development of healthy emotion regulation (Centre on the developing child, 2011a).

### **Tips for parents to support their children in developing emotion regulation**

In supporting children to develop emotion regulation, it is important that parents talk to their children to help them integrate their experiences and their emotions into a coherent whole. This can take place within a secure attachment relationship. Parents need to convey to their children the idea that their thoughts and emotions are important and they deserve to be taken into consideration (Davies, 2011: 265). Gilbert, Harte & Patrick (2011:32-34) make the following suggestions to parents in this regard:

- Ask the child to describe the occurrence.
- Carefully observe emotions that are expressed by the child during the account.
- Assist the child to identify and name his/her feeling by verbalizing the feeling(s) and providing the child with the correct words.
- Suggest what can be done to alleviate the feeling ('Let us cuddle a little ...').

In this way children learn to appropriately express their emotions and gain control over their lives by verbalizing their feelings, resulting in a heightened sense of self-esteem and competency.

## **Component 2: Social and emotional development**

### **4.5.5 Topic 5: Developing self-control and delayed gratification**

#### *4.5.5.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

Together with working memory and cognitive flexibility, self-control (or inhibitory control) is a component of the executive function of the prefrontal cortex of the brain. According to Diamond (2009, PowerPoint) executive function is more important for school readiness than IQ. Inhibitory

control and working memory both contribute to language and mathematical competence later in children's school progress (Diamond, 2009, PowerPoint) There were various indications in the data provided by the focus groups and the discussion group that the children in the target communities lack sufficient self-control for school readiness. They are playful, cannot focus and pay attention, and they shout out answers (E4). Some children drop out of school and start to abuse substances (SW4 & SW5), others display acting out behaviour in school (PC1) and follow their parents' bad example (PC2). Harsh discipline/physical abuse by parents (E3), abusing the child support grant to buy substances (SW4), swearing at the social worker (SW4), family violence (PC3, SW2), teenage pregnancy (SW1, SW2, E3), and community violence (E1, E3 and E4), indicate that the adults who should model self-control, set a poor example to the preschoolers. Children who are exposed to adult role models who lack self-control, will probably not develop the necessary self-control to be ready for the formal school system.

#### *4.5.5.2 Theoretical framework*

Self-control or inhibitory control, is the ability to suppress the desire to do one thing in favour of something more appropriate or more needed. It includes the ability to control an impulse to do or say something that is not allowed, to persevere in a task in spite of the temptation to do something more exciting, and the ability to focus one's attention in spite of disruptions. Self-control gives children the power to control their actions and attention instead of being controlled by external stimuli (Diamond, 2009, PowerPoint). Self-control is a vital component of self-regulation, without which children cannot function and thrive in school. Together with the other components of executive function self-control, children enjoy school more and their educators feel more positive about them, leading to reinforcement of their positive behaviour. This ultimately leads to improved school progress and less drop-out (Diamond, 2009, PowerPoint).

With regards to the causal factors in the development of self-control, there seems to be two schools of thought. Since lack of self-control is regarded as a prime cause of criminality, its development has been studied by researchers. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), as cited by Petkovsek and Boutwell (2014:1233), Wright and Beaver (2005:1169) and Crosswhite and Kerpelman (2005:715) postulated that self-control develops through parenting behaviours, including loving care and closeness, parental monitoring, identification of deviant behaviour and punishment of such behaviour. All four of these components had to be present for self-control to develop. The studies of Petkovsek and Boutwell (2014:1233) and Wright and Beaver (2005:1169) suggested that genetic factors such as intelligence and temperament, play a dominant role and that parenting plays such a secondary role, that it could not be counted on to be a decisive factor. In contrast to this viewpoint, Crosswhite and Kerpelman (2005:730) found that the parenting behaviours that Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) describe, as well as other parenting behaviours, played a significant role in the etiology of self-control. These included positive reinforcement,

autonomy support and communication. There are other authors supporting this stance. Brauer, Tittle, Antonaccio and Islam (2012:386) found in 500 randomly selected adults, indications that high levels of parental love and monitoring were associated with high self-control in adults, while perceived high levels of punishment were associated with lower levels of self-control. In a similar vein Lindsey, Cremeens, Colwell and Caldera (2008:392) found a connection between positive mutual, reciprocal parent-child interaction, and shared positive feelings and higher self-control and communication ability in the children. The literature study of Edwards, Sheridan and Knoche (2008:7) revealed that positive interactions of mothers with their children lay the foundation for compliance and self-control in young children.

Executive function can be developed, even in preschoolers, without special equipment (Diamond, 2009, PowerPoint). The following advice to parents to encourage the development of self-control in their children is described in literature:

*Modelling:* Parents should set an example of self-control to their children, who observe and learn from them how to maintain their composure in challenging situations (Chancellor, 2009:2).

*Identifying and Understanding Feelings:* Self-control is enhanced through emotion regulation. Parents, educators and caregivers should first of all become aware of their own thoughts and feelings, and be equipped with strategies of how to deal with their feelings, in order to be competent to convey this skill to their children (Chancellor, 2009:2). Expressing feelings in words activates the prefrontal cortex, leading to a reduced activation of the amygdala where emotional memory content is stored, which immediately brings relief to the person (Diamond, 2009, PowerPoint).

*Routine:* Parents and children working together to maintain a set routine, encourages the development of the executive function, including self-control, and enhances the parent-child relationship. Children need predictability and stability. A set routine provides certainty in an uncertain world and it allows them to know what to expect and to resist distractions (Centre on the developing Child, 2013).

*Choices:* Children are empowered when parents give them choices in everyday life. When a child is resisting brushing his teeth, the parent could ask him whether he prefers to undress or brush teeth first. Giving choices could avert conflict and confrontation (Chancellor, 2009:3).

*Discipline:* Several components of positive discipline are mentioned in literature, including reinforcing positive behaviour (Chancellor, 2009:4, Leong & Bedrova, 2003:4), and discussing with children inappropriate behaviour due to a loss of self-control and the consequences thereof (Chancellor, 2009:4).

*Social pretend play:* Diamond (2009, PowerPoint) regards social pretend play as a powerful tool to develop self-control as well as the other components of executive function in a fun way, because it teaches children to stick to the character that they portray and take into account the characters of the other children.

*Children need to know what to expect:* When parents prepare their children for what they could expect, children know what to anticipate and they can plan ahead. When they go shopping, parents can warn children that no sweets will be included. Asking the children to repeat what the parents had told them about sweets on approaching the shop, will enable the children to guide their own behaviour internally (Leong & Bedrova, 2003:4).

*Other games:* 'Stop and go' or 'freeze' games improve self-control and can be played anywhere. Children can also be asked to clap once every time they see a certain colour car and even mention the colour of the car (Leong & Bedrova, 2003:4).

## **Component 2: Social and emotional development**

### **4.5.6 Topic 6: Social development as a component of school readiness**

#### *4.5.6.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

The importance of social skills that children need in order to be school ready, were discussed at length in Chapter 2. During the focus group discussions with the professionals and the discussion group with parents, it was discovered that children in the target communities enter the school system without the necessary social skills. Some children are playful, cannot follow instructions, disrupt teaching and grab other learners' stuff (E4). They are destructive (E4) they develop behaviour problems (SW4 & SW5), they show poor relationship skills and repeat their parents' rude behaviour at school (E2, E4, PC1, PC2, PC3). Other learners have no patience, lash out with the least provocation and refuse to apologise (E2), and some of them bully the others (E4).

#### *4.5.6.2 Theoretical framework*

Social development as a component of school readiness was discussed in detail in Chapter 2. Some of the components of social school readiness are covered in the other topics in this chapter, such as self-control, moral development and positive discipline. This topic, as presented in the parenting programme, focuses on interpersonal skills that are needed for positive relationship building and prosocial behaviour. The following aspects were deemed important:

*Communication:* Communication skills is a lifelong asset for children. Children learn to communicate properly by observing their parents. Good communication between parent and child should start early, language should be on the child's level and good eye contact should be made. Parents should listen without interrupting and ask appropriate questions (Zolten, 2006:2). Some aspects of good communication were dealt with under other topics, such as listening (Building my child's self-esteem) and using words that build (Five love languages).

*Empathy:* According to Santrock, (2014:367) empathy denotes, to react to another's feelings with a similar emotion and to put oneself emotionally in another person's position. The debate on whether young children are essentially egocentric or have the capacity for empathy, is still raging, but there

have been comments by theorists that young children are socially more sensitive and perceptive than was thought before (Santrock, 2014:319). In light of this, Thompson (2013), as cited by Santrock (2014:319) suggests that parents and educators can develop children's understanding of other people's feelings, wishes and intentions by talking to them about it and by explaining it to them.

*Sharing and taking turns:* By the time children are four years of age, they have developed the belief that sharing is a compulsory part of social interaction. The arguments and give-and-take amongst siblings, play and important role in teaching children how to share, but parents can also guide children and set an example that children could transfer to peer relationships (Santrock, 2014:376).

*Practicing social scripts:* Social scripts provide a framework for behaving in a certain social situation. According to Dewar (2015, n.p.) parents who practice social scripts with their children, give children an idea of what to expect and how to behave in various social situations. This can be done verbally or through role play. Parents should also expose their children to polite social script in real life, through books and via television.

*Problem solving:* Parents should cooperate with their children to solve problems. Flexibility in problem solving is a handy coping tool that children can implement in various social situations (Zolten, 2007:6). Gilbert, Harte and Partrick, (2011:34) mention the importance that parents should model appropriate reactions to frustration and difficulties. They can use a catch phrase such as: 'What can we do to solve this?' to guide children to find a solution. They need to allow children to describe the problem, observe attentively their children's feelings, and discuss possible options. They can then support their children to find the most appropriate solution, but also allow the children to implement the solution (Gilbert, Harte & Partrick, 2011:34). Children need to learn that they have choices, they must learn to implement solutions to problems, and they must bear the consequences. This contributes to the development of autonomy, an essential skill for school readiness (Mental Health Foundation of Australia, 2007).

Mid-State Central Early Childhood Direction Center Bulletin (2009:6) provides the following six steps for parents to guide their children to effective problem solving:

- Support the child to verbalise the problem by asking what is happening and by reflecting back the answer.
- Brainstorm different possible solutions and make suggestions if needed.
- Discuss the possible implications of each option.
- Assist the child to agree on what is fair and what solution could be tried out.
- Support the child to implement the best solution.

- Review the results and give praise where needed.

*Dealing with conflict:* Conflict is a common occurrence in interaction amongst children. The ability to resolve conflict contributes to resilience and to positive relationship building with peers. Children need to learn to deal with conflict themselves even if parents are sometimes tempted to intervene. This gives them a sense of social mastery and it contributes to the development of autonomy (Skillsyouneed, 2015, n.p.; Mental Health Foundation of Australia, 2007). Skillsyouneed (2015, n.p.) encourages parents to teach children the power of words in problem solving, as opposed to the use of aggression. This advice can surely also be applied in dealing with conflict.

*Teaching responsibility:* According to the Mental Health Foundation of Australia (2007) children develop responsibility when they become mindful that they are independent beings whose actions have consequences. Taking on age-appropriate tasks and bearing the consequences, develop responsibility in children. Parents need to be patient when children make mistakes, give them choices whenever possible, and encourage them to be innovative and creative.

*Good sportsmanship:* Dewar (2015, n.p.) suggests that team sports offers an ideal opportunity for developing social skills, on condition that parents teach their children how to be good sportsmen. Feedback should be given to them when they succeed in applying the principles of good sportsmanship.

## **Component 2: Social and emotional development**

### **4.5.7 Topic 7: Identity development**

#### *4.5.7.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

A positive identity is crucial for children's overall psychological well-being since it empowers them to be in control of their lives and it helps them to manage their experiences (Warin, 2010, *in* Raburu, 2015:96). Developing a 'positive' identity is a core goal in any person's life. It is an important condition for developing resilience and meeting the challenges of growing up, especially for children coming from disadvantaged environments (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:14). A sense of identity is a component of self-esteem, which is crucial for the healthy mental and academic development of children (Gordon & Browne, 2004:526 *in* De Witt, 2016:126). The children in the two target communities live in challenging circumstances where poverty, family and community violence, and substance abuse are part of the fibre of the communities and where their families are stigmatized by terms such as 'vulnerable' and 'at risk'. Brooker and Woodhead (2008:4) describe the effect that living in challenging circumstances have on identity development, as follows: 'Where children live in a family, community or society characterised by inequalities and/or conflicts, they (and their families) may experience exclusion or discrimination, and these

experiences will shape children's growing identity, their sense of who they are, where they belong, and how far they feel valued and respected'.

#### 4.5.7.2 *Theoretical framework*

In the midst of adversity, Grade R learners need to develop a positive identity in order to be school ready. They need to be certain of who they are and to feel valued and respected. In the attainment of their rights as unique human beings, parents play a crucial role (United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2005, par 15). In light of the opinion of the above authors, it is vitally important that the parents in the target communities be empowered to realise that they have an important role to play in the formation of their children's identity, and that they can choose to support their children's identity by emphasising the good in the communities instead of to be dragged down by the negatives. In this the parents need to be motivated and empowered with knowledge on how to go about supporting the process of identity development in their children.

#### **The development of identity**

Identity can be described as 'the feeling that a person has that he is still the same person in spite of the passage of time and any of its concomitant changes', or who children believe themselves to be (Raburu, 2015:95). Identity is an important part of development towards adulthood and helps children to attach value to themselves. Identity formation is the process of learning what to answer to the question, 'Who am I?' (De Witt, 2016:127). Brooker and Woodhead, (2008:10,12) state that young children's identities may be modified as culture, relationships and social contexts change, and that identity should be regarded as a multiple construct containing multiple 'identities'. This allows children to call on their different identities according to the requirements of different contexts. The following 'identities' that form part of children's identity were found in literature:

*Legal identity:* According to the United Nations' *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, identity is a legal concept and every child is entitled to be registered as a citizen of a country (Raburu, 2015:95; Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:2). It is further stated in the convention that children should be recognized as persons in their own right, who are active members of families and communities and who have their own concerns, points of view and interests (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:3). According to the South African Births and Deaths Registration Act, 1992 every child born in the Republic of South Africa needs to be registered with the Department of Home Affairs within 30 days of birth. A birth certificate is issued to the child, which then entitles him to enjoy the rights of a South African citizen. A birth certificate is proof of respect for a child's unique identity (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:2).

*Personal identity:* Personal identity indicates children's subjective experience of their uniqueness and distinctiveness from others and that they are individuals in their own right (Raburu, 2015:95

cites Schaffer, 2006). Brooker & Woodhead (2008:6) cite Göncü (1999), who said that the development of personal identity is a dynamic process that can be described as constructed, co-constructed and reconstructed by the child through their activities and relationships in everyday interactions with parents, educators, peers and others. Personal identity includes an awareness of the self as 'I' (subject) and 'me' (object) (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:6). About the age of 15-24 months babies become aware of their separateness from the world around them and that they have a recognizable identity (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:221). From a young age children construe their identity through narratives that express their own subjective view of events and activities in their own lives, and through which they attach meaning to these events (Reese, Yan, Jack, & Hayne, 2010:23, 29). Raburu (2015:95) found that preschoolers (4-6 year olds) could already express the self through writing, drawing, narratives and scaffolding tasks.

*Social identity:* This term refers to children's experience of themselves as similar to others (or they would like to be) when they are with other people, and especially amongst their peers (Schaffer, 2006, in Raburu, 2015:95). The social development of Grade R children will be discussed in a separate section. Woodhead (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:6) highlights that identity has two distinct aspects: 'that of the unique individual person and that of the shared social person'. There is a dynamic surrounding 'personal' versus 'social' identity that simultaneously satisfies two core human needs, the need to belong and the need to be unique (Schaffer, 1996:80, in Raburu, 2015:95). The development of the two identities of individuality and of belonging to the Grade R learners, was strengthened through an activity that will be discussed in part two of this session.

*Gender identity:* Differences between boys and girls behaviour and preference of toys are visible from an early age. By the time that children are three years old, most of them have reached *gender identity*. The next stage is *gender stability*, which means that the child knows that gender is usually stable over time. A girl will know that she will become a mommy when she grows up. The next stage that is reached at about 7 years, is gender constancy, meaning that children know that gender is fixed even if appearance changes. A child will know that a boy is still a boy even if he grows his hair long (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:216; Halim & Rubel, 2010:295). Acquiring appropriate sex role behaviour, takes place through the process of social learning when children observe the behaviour of parents or educators and when parents and educators encourage and reinforce typical gender-based behaviour in boys or girls. They might encourage girls to be more nurturing, but they will discourage this in boys (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:220). Parents generally reinforce their children's gender from birth by dressing them in a certain way, encouraging certain behaviours and buying them 'boy' or 'girl' toys. Girls are encouraged to be more nurturant and obedient than boys (Hildebrand, 1990:290; Smith, *et al.*, 2011:220). Sex role stereotyping causes people to label children who deviate from the expected behaviour of a certain gender role. When a girl is interested in the outdoors and sports, she is labelled a 'tomboy' and when a boy is gentle or

interested in the arts, he is labelled as a 'sissy' (Hildebrand, 1990:305). Pressure from peers on children to behave in sex-stereotypical ways, can also be strong (Smith, *et al.*, 2011:217).

*Body identity:* Rice, Larkin and Jette (2002: 1) quote Thompson, Heinberg, Altabe and Tantleff-Dunn (1999) who describe body image as a person's inner perception of her outer appearance. Body image develops during the preschool years. Children are aware of their bodies long before they attach value to them. In developing body dissatisfaction parents play an important role. Programs to prevent poor body image or body dissatisfaction, need to target kindergarten (Grade R) learners and their parents, in order to dispel notions that certain types of body shapes are unacceptable, and to bring to parents' attention the harm that their body-related words, attitudes and actions do to their children's body image (Tremblay, Lovsin, Zecevic & Larivière, 2011:291; Rice, *et al.*, 2002:1).

*Cultural identity:* Cultural identity is a feeling of belonging to a specific group of people (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:18). According to the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (2005, par 15,16) the family is the conduit for the transmission of culture identity for children. Through family practices and activities children acquire the cultural values, skills and customs of the family and community, which provides them with a framework for a cultural identity. In this way children have the opportunity to develop a unique individual identity simultaneous with an identity that includes the cultural characteristics of the family and community, in other words a 'collective identity'. This environment allows for 'individuality within connectedness' (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:17). Children growing up in adverse circumstances may experience problems with positive identity development. Brooker and Woodhead (2008:17) suggest that the finest way of promoting these children's personal development is through supporting the identity and stability of their families.

*Ideal identity:* In contrast with the other forms of identity that focus on traits that children already have, the ideal identity refers to characteristics that children hold dear and would like to achieve (De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002:510). Ideal identity has three aspects: the ideal person that they want to be (for example dreaming of becoming a second Renaldo); the ideal situation to be in (which could include a profession, wealth or living in another place); and the ideal character traits to possess (courage, honesty, loyalty). Children's environment, key role players, the media and culture plays a role in inspiring them to form an ideal identity. It is only when the desired characteristics have become part of a person's ideal identity that the person actively aspires to become or obtain those characteristics. Although these characteristics still have to be acquired, they influence the person's thoughts and actions through inspiring them to strive towards its realisation. This is true of children who believe that they will be able to reach their ideals. When the opposite is true and children believe that it is not worth trying, ideals can be discouraging and they

can undermine their self-esteem and self-respect (De Ruyter & Conroy, 2002:512-515). De Ruyter and Conroy (2002:515) highlight the importance of the ideal self, because it provides children with a sense of purpose and meaning and give them direction. However, children should not only be presented with different ideals from which to form an ideal identity, they need to be assisted to evaluate different ideals and to decide which ideals can be integrated into their identity.

Identity formation is a process that starts at birth and takes place in the context of relationships. Young children already have a good concept of their role and position in their family, preschool and neighbourhood, and how the way that they are treated, impacts on their sense of who they are. This concept of themselves is always changing as they encounter new experiences, meet new people and build relationships with a diverse group of adults and peers (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:1,6). Different factors like age, gender, religion and ethnicity, interests, role models and celebrities, talents and hobbies play a part in a child's emerging concept of self (Raburu, 2015:95). Parents as key role players in young children's lives can contribute significantly to positive identity formation. De Witt (2016:128) quotes Berk (2006:462) Bredenkamp (2014) and Boyd and Bee (2014) with the following advice for parents to support healthy identity development of their children:

- Engage in open and warm conversation with children on an age-appropriate level about what they are interested in. Talk about values and goals;
- Encourage children to participate in extracurricular activities or vocational programmes at school or at other institutions to stimulate their interests and develop their talents;
- In a multi-cultural society it is vital that children have the opportunity to explore their own ethnic and cultural heritage, as well as that of other groupings in an atmosphere of respect.

Raburu (2008:101) advises that children should be encouraged to play with friends and peers to develop their identities. This researcher also suggests that parents should provide children with ample opportunities to play, because that enhances identity development.

## **Component 2: Social and emotional development**

### **4.5.8 Topic 8: How to convey values to my child**

#### *4.5.8.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

It emerged in the focus group discussions that many children in the target communities are exposed to circumstances and adult behaviour that contrast sharply to acceptable morals and values. Several examples of antisocial behaviour that learners in the communities learn from their parents and other role players became evident during the discussions with the role players in the

target communities. The educators felt that children are being taught values and morals at home that are in conflict with commonly held values. E4 told of a parent who thinks his child's naughtiness is 'cute' and another parent whose child has to collect cigarette butts for him. E1 has a learner in her class who bragged that he and his father drank alcohol together. The educators also told of learners being exposed to the anti-social activities of their parents. The social workers also named examples of how children are influenced to become involved in anti-social activities. SW3 told of a boy of 8 years old who sometimes went out with his 17-year-old brother to rob people with a firearm. Two social workers had knowledge of parents who used their daughters for prostitution (SW2, SW3). The one mother sent out her daughter every night and was angry when the daughter returned without money. Another case of confusing morals was a lady in the community who told a social worker that she did not have to work, because gangsters rented the wooden cabin in her back garden for R500 per week to sell drugs from (SW2). Furthermore, the children are exposed to anti-social activities in the community, including drug abuse and violence. Being exposed to parents, family members and community members whose lifestyle and behaviour are anti-social, places children in a moral dilemma when they are confronted with contrasting values and when the example that they have received from their parents is contrary to that which is acceptable.

#### *4.5.8.2 Theoretical framework*

Moral development is the process of learning what is right and what is wrong and it forms an integral part of social development. Children are not born with the knowledge of what is right and wrong, but they have the potential to acquire the ability for ethical and moral judgement (De Witt, 2016:33). Children entering the school system are expected to adhere to simple moral concepts, such as respect for others, fairness and personal responsibility (WCECD, 2011:21). Only when they have internalized morals and values, can they generalize these rules to the school and to peer relationships (Thompson & Twibell, 2009:214). The challenge for the student was to create awareness with the Grade R parents of the importance of their children's moral development and their role in this process, as well as to provide them with practical suggestions on how to convey values to their children.

The first five years of children's lives are a time of tremendous moral development and the emergence of empathy and guilt associated with morality (Malti, Dys & Zuffiano, 2015:3). Preschoolers do not yet have an internalized value system and their capacity for acting morally correct, is guided by their need for love and approval. They do not yet have the internal controls to adhere to parental expectation and they rely on their parents and other adults to act as their conscience (Duncan, 2011:287). This process takes place through the guidance that parents give to their children according to their own views and convictions (De Witt, 2016:33). Shaffer and Kipp (2010:586) mention that there are three components to moral behaviour: cognitive, emotional and

behavioural. These three components need to be addressed in a study of how sound moral development can be promoted in young children.

*An emotional or affective component:* This consists of feelings like guilt, pride and empathy that motivate moral thoughts and behaviour. With regards to this component the development of conscience is an important component of moral development;

*A cognitive component:* The mental knowledge of what is right and what is wrong and making decisions about behaviour;

*A behavioural component:* This determines the way children actually behave when they are tempted to lie, cheat or act in a way that compromises moral values.

When considering literature to determine which parental behaviours encourage the development of these three components of moral behaviour, the following appears repeatedly:

*Emotional component:* This component refers to the development of emotions associated with moral behaviour (guilt, shame, compassion) and the emergence of conscience. Empathy and kindness from parents are powerful agents for the transmission of values and beliefs (Duncan, 2011:292). A secure attachment to a warm, responsive parent has constantly been found to play a decisive role in how children identify with their parents' moral values (Duncan, 2011:291; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:586; Edwards, Sheridan & Knoche, 2008:4-5). Several authors cite the research of Kochanska and her associates with regards to the development of conscience ((Matozell, *et al.*, 2014:240; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:586, Narvaez, & Lapsley, 2009:252.), who consistently found that a warm, loving mother-child relationship was associated with children who were not only eager to accept their mothers' instructions and rules, but also that of other adults. Their values were better internalized and they were morally more mature than other children. These researchers concluded that the impact of the early mother-child relationship could potentially be extensive (Kochanska & Murray, 2000:429). In a more recent study (Kochanska, Koenig, Barry, Kim & Yoon, 2010, n.p.) it was found that children who had internalized their parents' values during the preschool years, presented with fewer antisocial behaviour later at school, and that they had formed a self-view of a moral, good person that guided their behaviour.

*Cognitive component:* Kohlberg's theory of moral development is based on moral reasoning. He developed his theory by questioning children about possible solutions to several moral dilemmas. He not only studied their responses but also the rationale behind their responses. From the responses he deduced three levels of moral development with two stages on each level (Hildebrand, 1990:292-293; Santrock, 2014:361; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:589). Grade R learners fall in the pre-conventional level of morality where rules and obedience are not internalized yet, but are enforced on the child from the outside (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:590). This level has two stages:

*Stage 1:* Children cannot reason morally and they do not yet have a sense of right and wrong. They are aware of obedience and punishment and they behave primarily to avoid punishment (Hildebrand, 1990:22; Santrock, 2014:361). They may not regard an act as wrong if they are not detected and punished (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:590).

*Stage 2:* Children behave to get rewards and to avoid punishment. To them right is what brings pleasant consequences and wrong is what causes unpleasant consequences. Reciprocity now develops, but only if it holds benefits for the child, in other words he is kind to those who are kind to him, and he hurts those who hurt him (Hildebrand, 1990:293; Santrock, 2014:361; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:590).

Critics of Kohlberg state that he underestimated the ability of children to reason morally (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:596). This criticism is confirmed by the results of Labile and Thompson (2002) in Shaffer and Kipp (2010:596) who found indications of a strong internalized conscience in children of 4.5 – 6 years of age who were securely attached to their mothers. These preschoolers displayed a readiness to comply with rules even in the absence of adults and they showed signs of guilt when they thought that they had disobeyed.

Regular conversations about what is right and wrong, taking into account children's feelings and ideas about issues, foster the development of sound moral judgement. Children should be allowed to participate in family discourse about moral issues to develop healthy moral reasoning. Malti, Dys and Zuffiano (2015:3) refer to five studies that found that a high use of induction (calm discussion of the reasons why certain behaviour is wrong and how it affects other people) and low use of power as a form of discipline, is conducive to moral development. On the other hand, forceful confrontations and the use of power-assertive techniques by parents, inhibit internalisation of values, possibly because it elicits defensive reactions from children and adolescents who view this behaviour as hostile criticism (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:593), and because the reactivity on the part of the children prevents them from reflecting on the situation (Labile & Thompson, 2002:11).

*Behavioural component:* The test for good moral development is whether children choose to adhere to rules and values when they are not under the direct control of parents or educators. Bandura adapted his social learning theory to a cognitive learning theory, indicating that learning is a cognitive process. According to Bandura's adapted social cognitive learning theory, children learn through observation of other people. They observe the behaviour of people in their environment and mentally put 'chunks' of behaviour together from different observed models to form new behaviour patterns (Marorell, *et al.*, 2014:33).

Parents' example of moral behaviour also plays a powerful role in the transmission of values and morals. When parents model wrong behaviour, children tend to follow their example, even though

these children may know that the behaviour is contrary to healthy moral behaviour. This could also cause intense confusion when children enter school and the values that they encounter there are contrary to that of their parents (Duncan, 2011:292 citing Berg-Nielsen, Vikan & Dahl, 2002). When parents exercise harsh parenting with shouting and verbal abuse, children focus more on the parents' emotions and less on the moral reasoning that the parents are trying to convey. Harsh parenting and physical punishment are consistently associated with less internalization of values and poorer self-regulation (Duncan, 2011:292).

Narvaez and Lapsley (2009:260-261) highlight the importance of starting the process of moral development when children are still very small and they propose an Ethical Education model consisting of five empirically derived steps for parents, educators and others directed at ethical character development. This will be applied to parents for the purposes of this study:

1. Firstly, parents should establish a warm, caring relationship with their children;
2. Parents should be role models of excellence in conduct and ethical behaviour;
3. Encourage and promote activities that embody ethical skills. Through discussion and questions children's minds and intuition should be sharpened to judge ethical issues and situations.
4. The importance of self-regulation and self-monitoring needs to be brought to children's attention. They need to understand that the ultimate choice to behave ethically, lies with them.

This topic was presented to the parents under the heading: How do I teach my child values.

## **Component 2: Social and emotional development**

### **4.5.9 Topic 9: The value of play in the school readiness of Grade R learners.**

#### *4.5.9.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

The choice of play as a topic for the parenting programme, was based on two benefits for school readiness (Milteer, Ginsburg & Council on Communications and Media and Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2012: .204; Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:133; National Literacy Trust, 2016, n.p.):

- The contribution that it makes to all the developmental domains of school readiness;
- The contribution that it makes towards building the bond between parent and child. Play gives parents the opportunity to engage fully with their children, to strengthen the bond between them and view the world from the children's perspective.

Another consideration was that Participant PC3 in the parent focus discussion group also suggested that parenting programmes offer opportunities for play and fun to parents and children.

#### *4.5.9.2 Theoretical framework*

'Let it never be said that play is useless.' (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:262). Play as part of preschoolers' development takes a prominent place in child development literature. According to Mukherji and Dryden (2014:123) and Martorell, *et al.* (2014:315) the value of play is so widely recognized that children's right to play is acknowledged in legislation and policy documents worldwide. Although play is an activity that has few obligations and little discipline, it contributes greatly to children's development (De Witt, 2016:136). The parenting programme is designed to be implemented in resource poor communities. Families living in poverty often do not have access to resources and opportunities for their children to play, impeding their healthy social and emotional development. It is vital for parents and professionals to acknowledge the lifelong benefits of play (Milteer, Ginsburg & Council on Communications and Media and Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2012:204). Polat and Sonmez (2015:157) found that, when disadvantaged children growing up in institutions were involved in a 'Play supported Program' for school readiness, involving three play activities per day for eight months, significant gains were made in all areas of school readiness by the experimental group compared to the control groups.

Play is beneficial to children's development in the following ways:

*Physical development:* sensorimotor development when children climb, kick a ball, run or carry objects around (De Witt, 2016:138). Through play children stimulate their senses, gain mastery over their bodies, improve their eye-hand coordination and exercise their muscles (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:315).

*Cognitive development:* the development of thinking-, concentration-, problem solving and creative skills, flexible and adaptive thinking, and verbal and non-verbal communication skills (De Witt, 2016:137; National Literacy Trust, 2016, n.p.; Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:135; Milteer, Ginsburg, Council on Communications and Media & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2012:205; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:262). Sorting blocks and shapes contributes to mathematical development (Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:315). According to Carter (2015:38) play involves children in 'what if' thinking, where they can try out new possibilities and learn from mistakes and failures without negative consequences.

*Emotional development:* contributes to a feeling of well-being, because there is no right or wrong in play and there is no risk of failure (De Witt, 2016: 139). A whole range of aspects of emotional development that are developed through play are described by De Witt (2016:139) citing Gordon and Browne (1989: 302) and Mayesky, 2006:113):

- building self-confidence and a positive self-image (Mukherji & Dryden (2014:135);
- learning to view matters from different perspectives;
- getting rid of inner fears and conflict;

- expressing feelings of anger, anxiety and frustration in an appropriate way (Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:262) and the development of strategies for dealing with conflict, anxiety and stress (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:135);
- building trust in others;
- gaining autonomy;
- learning to take risks;
- gaining self-control;
- learning competencies in several areas;
- achieve mastery of the environment;
- testing the expression of feelings in a safe way;
- self-directed play teaches children motivation and concentration (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:135).

*Social development:* Shaffer and Kipp (2010:262) place emphasis on pretend play and the contribution that it makes to the social development of young children, including learning to adopt different roles, coordinate activities and resolve conflict that might arise. Gordon and Browne (1989:329 in De Witt, 2016:140) mention the following social skills that are derived from play:

- learning to take turns and cooperate with others;
- the development of social language skills;
- learning to verbalise needs;
- learning cultural values and practices as well as rules of society;
- learning to respect other's property and rights;
- developing group identity and an awareness of self as part of a group;
- providing delight and pleasure (National Literacy Trust (2016, n.p.);)
- building self-identification and gender-identification;
- promotes a feeling of control by providing the option of joining in or not;
- developing common goals and interests;
- learning to see others' perspectives;
- encouraging the development of independence and self-regulation (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:134).

Children must be enabled to play freely without the interference or control of adults, because maximum development across all domains takes place when children are deeply involved in play (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:136).

### **Different types of play**

Developmental literature refers to the classification of play by Mildred Parten who described in 1932 already different types or phases of play (De Witt, 2016:140; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:318):

*Unconcerned/unoccupied play:* A child looks on without joining in. He keeps himself busy with what catches his attention, such as climbing on a chair.

*Solitary/non-social play:* The child plays with toys other than those used by children nearby, but he makes no effort to join them. Martorell, *et al.*, (2014:316) mention in this regard that solitary play does not necessarily indicate a problem – it depends on why the child plays on his own. It could raise concern if the child is unable to join in play with others because of anxiety or shyness.

*Spectator play:* The child specifically watches other children playing. He may speak to them and ask questions, but he does not join in.

*Parallel play:* The child plays alongside other children, but with his own toys. He may be busy with a similar activity such as building blocks, but he does not play with them.

*Associative play:* The child plays with other children and they talk and exchange toys, but they do not share the same goal, there is no division of labour or roles and each child plays as he wishes.

*Cooperative play or associative play:* The child participates in a group that is organised to achieve a goal such as build something or play sports. There are leaders who direct the play, there are different roles, and the child plays with other children. As children mature, they engage increasingly in associative and cooperative play.

Literature points out the importance that parents' attitude towards play needs to be positive for the maximum benefit to be derived from it. Lin & Yawkey (2014:111) found in their own research and in other studies that the children of parents who valued the influence of play on their children's development, rated higher in social competence – as rated by parents and educators – than parents who did not attach any value to play. The former group of parents were more engaged in their children's play and created more opportunities for them to play. Kochanska, Kim, Boldt and Nordling (2013:701) researched the benefits of coaching parents to adopt a child-directed approach when playing with their children and following the children's cues and lead. These children were significantly more cooperative and compliant with their parents. These researchers cite other studies confirming these results.

Gilbert, Harte and Patrick (2011:32-34) talk about the educational value of purposeful play and they provide the following suggestions to parents for purposeful play that develops school readiness skills:

- Provide ample learning materials, such as plastic bowls and buckets that are found around the house;
- Engage in conversation, speaking constantly to the child, using parallel speech (describing what the child is doing), asking open-ended questions and waiting for the child to respond. Conversation can be enriched by substituting familiar words with new, unfamiliar ones;

- Offer messy activities such as play with finger paint or sand and water. This develops children’s perceptual skills, hearing squishy sounds or seeing different colours blending together, and could expand their vocabulary when parents verbalise these experiences;
- Engage children in their own learning by asking probing questions, responding with rich descriptions and asking follow-up questions;
- Foster self-regulation by encouraging and talking about more mature social skills such as problem solving, perspective taking impulse control.

### **Component 3: Resilience**

The data collected during the focus groups and the discussion group indicated that the parents and learners living in the target communities have to contend with many challenges that pose a serious risk to children’s school readiness. There is ample evidence in literature that exposure to multiple stressors could seriously disadvantage children’s early development and their potential to become school ready (Benzies, *et al.*, 2014:203; Centre on the Developing Child, 2016, n.p.). According to Gilbert and Orlick (2002:56) children’s capacity to focus and retain information is profoundly affected by stress. These authors deduced that children, if they are not taught coping skills when they are young, resort to ineffective or unsuitable coping strategies in the face of adversity. However, teaching positive life skills to children when they are young, empowers them to bounce back after setbacks and apply effective coping strategies (Gilbert and Orlick, 2002:54). In their video on the science of resilience, The Centre on the Developing Child (2015) speaks of a ‘tool kit’ with which children can be equipped in order to survive in adverse circumstances. The one overall tool is a warm, nurturing relationship with a caring adult. This ‘tool’ was addressed by Topic 1 but also continuously during the programme. The researcher selected three additional topics to include in the Grade R learners’ ‘tool kit’, namely humour and fun, positive thinking and parental wellness. The researcher postulated that, if the Grade R learners and their parents could be supported to build coping skills that promote resilience, the school readiness of the learners would also be enhanced.

### **Component 3: Resilience**

#### **4.5.10 Topic 10: Humour and fun**

Humour and fun, together with positive thinking and parent wellness, was one of the topics identified to enhance coping skills

##### *4.5.10.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

See above the description of the rationale for the selection of Component 3: Resilience.

#### 4.5.10.2 *Theoretical framework*

'Humour is what makes something funny; a sense of humour is the ability to recognize it' (Encouraging your child's sense of humour, 2016). Humour is one of the most familiar human emotions (Rieger & MacGrail, 2015:188). Humour is currently defined more broadly than before and could include jokes, cartoons, comedy films, to the cognitive process of producing, perceiving and interpreting the humour, or to the responses of laughter and enjoyment that it elicits. Humour mostly occurs between people, but could also be intrapsychic (Martin, n.d.:4).

Holt (2007 n.p.) distinguishes between two types of humour:

*Destructive humour*, which lowers children's self-esteem, is belittling and excluding, causes tension, focuses on negatives and creates barriers between people.

*Constructive humour*, which builds children's self-esteem, includes everyone, is relaxing and comforting, energises people and creates a positive atmosphere. It further reduces anxiety and stress, facilitates learning and creativity and builds relationships.

Babies start to smile when they are approximately four months old and they start to laugh in response to their environment during the following year. A sense of humour develops together with cognitive development and preschoolers can already appreciate incongruity and absurdity. By the time that children are seven or eight years old, they already have a sense of humour resembling that of adults (Lovorn, 2008:n.p.). At this stage, it is vital for children not be exposed to the wrong kind of humour. Humour that is degrading and puts people down, could harm their interpersonal skills and cognitive and social development (Nelson, 1989, as cited by Lovorn, 2008, n.p.).

#### **Benefits of humour**

*Humour builds relationships:* Humour builds trusting relationships between parents and children (Lovorn, 2008:n.p.). Rieger and McGrail's (2015:189) review of the literature on humour and their own two studies suggest that humour contributes significantly to family functioning and it enhances feelings of closeness and acceptance in the family (Rieger & McGrail, 2015:194; Rieger & McGrail, 2013:89).

*Humour promotes personal well-being:* Children with a healthy sense of humour have positive self-esteem, they enjoy life more and are more hopeful, they are better liked by their peers, they develop emotional competence and enjoy better health (Encouraging your child's sense of humour, 2016).

*Humour promotes resilience:* Rieger and McGrail (2013:89) refer to coping humour and describe it as the use of humour by people to deal more effectively with the impact of one or more life stressors. These authors refer to Martin (2007) and Merz, Malcarne, Hansdottir, Furst, Clements and Weisman (2009) who state that coping humour involves efforts at keeping a humorous

perspective in spite of adversity. In their summary of activities that promote resilience, Alvord and Grados (2005:241) mention that activities that promote family fun, laughter and humour, can have a healing effect and can be incorporated into a family therapy programme. Humour is a safe window through which serious moral and social issues could be explored and through which children can learn about the world and about the human condition (Holt, 2007, n.p.). Humour releases stress and can act as a 'safety valve' to prevent unbearable conditions from becoming intolerable (Holt, 2007 n.p.). Neurological investigation has revealed that humour activates the reward centre of the brain where dopamine, a powerful feel-good chemical is released (Force, 2015, n.p.). Martin (2005:5) and Lovorn (2008, n.p.) refer to Freud (1905) who viewed humour as one of the healthiest coping mechanisms, because it alleviates the damaging effects of adversity. *Humour promotes learning*: Humour creates within people a pleasurable experience that opens them up to discussion and interaction. In this way it captures children's interest and puts them in a state of readiness for learning (Freud, 1905 as cited by Lovorn, 2008:n.p). In the same vein Lindsey, Cremeens, Colwell and Caldera (2008:393) found that, when mothers and their toddlers shared positive emotion, it contributed to language competence. These researchers postulate that shared positive emotion may prolong the parent-child interaction exposing the toddlers to longer communication with the mothers, or it causes the mothers' communications to be more salient to the toddlers. Enjoying their parents' creative use of word play and puns is more than just fun, because it boosts cognitive development and creativity in children (Lovorn, 2008.n.p). Humour enables children to see things from different perspectives, to understand issues from new perspectives and to have a deeper insight into things (Encouraging your child's sense of humour, 2016, n.p.).

Any person can develop a sense of humour. *Encouraging your child's sense of humour* (2016) advises parents that it is never too early to start encouraging a sense of humour in their children. Parents should be on the lookout for opportunities to laugh and joke with their children during everyday life and to keep encouraging a sense of humour in their children. Parents should be good role models of humour by being spontaneous, playful and laughing out loud with their children.

### **Component 3: Resilience**

#### **4.5.11 Topic 11: Teach your child to think positively**

The second topic was to provide children with a 'tool kit' and build their resilience through positive thinking.

##### *4.5.11.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

See above the description of the rationale for the selection of Component 3: Resilience

#### 4.5.11.2 *Theoretical framework*

Naseem and Khalid (2010:42) associate positive thinking with positive emotions such as joy, hope and optimism. Positive thinking allows people to view situations in a positive light and it contributes to creativity, growth and success. On the other hand, people who think negatively do not expect their plans to work out and they experience problems coping with stress, leading to poor psychological and physical health (Naseem & Khalid, 2010:42). Naseem and Khalid (2010:42) cite McGrath (2004) who described positive thinking as an attitude finding expression in thinking, behaviour, emotions and speaking. Positive thinkers meet stressful situations with the perception that they will be able to control it and then they deal with it more effectively than negative thinkers (Naseem & Khalid, 2010:43). Several decades ago the benefits of positive thinking were already explored. Scheier and Carver (1993:29) found that optimists, who always expect good things to happen, used a variety of emotion-focused coping strategies, including the tendency to view situations in a realistic light and gain personal growth through hardships. Optimists have a definite advantage over pessimists in coping, even in severe adversity. Optimists are also less inclined to avoid problems than pessimists and they maintain higher levels of subjective well-being in times of adversity (Scheier and Carver, 1993:27).

Research results on the influence of positive thinking training for children vary. The Australian programme Aussie Optimism Positive Thinking Skills Program for learners between eight and eleven years old, contains a cognitive component teaching children to identify and change negative thoughts about themselves, their life and the future. The research by Myles-Pallister, Hassan, Rooney & Kane (2014:7) did not produce conclusive evidence that the programme contributed to the social and emotional learning skills, although parents reported a reduction in their children's difficult behaviour. In a sample of depressed children Johnstone, Rooney, Hassan and Kane (2014:7) found no significant reduction in children's depressive symptomatology after 54 months post-testing. However, these researchers refer to other studies that confirmed the positive results of the Australian programme.

Gilbert and Orlick (2002:59-61) researched elementary school (Grade 1-6) learners' capability to learn and apply positive life skills. The participants were instructed over a period of 9 weeks to apply various relaxation techniques and to find highlights in their everyday lives – simple things that they could be grateful for, but that they would normally not notice. The results indicated that there were significant gains in these learners' ability to relax and to find highlights in various life situations. These researchers postulate that teaching children to recognise highlights, promotes a more positive attitude in the learners to feel better about themselves. Benzies and Mychasiuk (2009:105) quote Amatea, Smith-Adock and Villares (2006) who studied protective factors that promote academic achievement and found that several factors in families, including a positive outlook on life, promoted academic achievement in children across all socio-economic spheres.

Abdelmonem and Qasim (2014:21, 22) incorporated positive thinking skills training into a movement programme for obese children between five and seven years of age in Rumania. The instructors supported the children in converting non-useful thoughts into thoughts containing positive words, such as: 'I can stop eating candy' or 'I will be the star child because all my friends love me' and 'I'll complete the game to the end'. The results indicated a significant increase in the positive thoughts and self-confidence in the participating children.

### **Component 3: Resilience**

#### **4.5.12 Topic 12: Parent wellness**

##### *4.5.12.1 Rationale for selecting this topic*

During the focus group discussion it emerged that parents in the target communities experience considerable stress and depression (SW1, SW2, SW3, SW5). There is ample evidence in literature that parents who parent in adverse circumstances are more prone to stress and depression. The Centre on The Developing Child (2009, n.p.) found that maternal depression is disproportionately represented in poor communities (25%), and that the children of these mothers are at high risk for delayed brain development. Research has further revealed that depressive symptoms in mothers could lead to a low mastering of motivation and withdrawal in young children, leading to poor academic results (Yan & Dix, 2016:1296). Sohr-Preston and Scaramella (2006:74) found that children whose mothers suffered from depression during their infancy, could experience delays in cognitive and language development. The research of Reising, *et al.* (2013:340) established that economic disadvantaged children, often have to contend with depressed parents and subsequent disrupted parenting, leading to externalizing and internalizing problems in the children. The study of Soltis, Davidson, Moreland, Felton and Dumas (2015:565) suggests that parents who experienced high levels of stress, also reported lower levels of social coping in their children, that has a negative effect on their school readiness. However, if interventions with depressed parents and their families are done timeously, there may be positive results for parents and children (Centre on the Developing Child, 2009). Duncombe, Havighurst, Holland and Frankling (2012:731) state that parental well-being reduces the probability of child problem behaviour by promoting children's ability to regulate their own behaviour.

##### *4.5.12.2 Theoretical framework*

The session with the parents consisted of two short pieces of information that addressed lifestyle and self-talk.

##### ***Lifestyle:***

Lifestyle as a determinant of mental health and well-being has been underestimated by health professionals for a long time. Walsh (2011:580-587) recommends the following aspects that need to be addressed as part of a healthy lifestyle:

- Nutrition and diet (Walsh, 2011:581)
- Exercise (Walsh, 2011:580)
- Spending time in nature (Walsh, 2011:583)
- Relationships (Walsh, 2011:584)
- Recreation and enjoyable activities (Walsh, 2011:584)
- Stress management (Walsh, 2011:585)
- Religion and spiritual nourishment (Walsh, 2011:586)
- Service to others (Walsh, 2011:587)

### ***Self-talk***

All people talk to themselves during the day while going about their business. Self-talk determines how people perceive other people, situations or events and is partly conscious and partly unconscious. Negative self-talk causes people to feel anxious or depressed and it can lead to self-defeating behaviour. An example of self-defeating behaviour is if a student does not learn for a test, because he tells himself that he will fail anyway. (Edelman & Rémond, 2005, n.p.)

Bourne (2012, n.p.) describes the following characteristics of self-talk, and in particular negative self-talk:

- It is so subtle and involuntary that the person does not realise it or the effect that it has on his emotions.
- It can be only a word or image ('Oh no!') that provokes a whole series of memories, feelings and connotations.
- It is typically irrational, but it is sometimes so close to the truth, that it cannot be distinguished from the truth.
- It leads to avoidance of people or situations associated with the negative messages.
- Seriously negative self-talk can lead to an anxiety attack.
- The brain needs to be reprogrammed to start giving positive, uplifting and confident messages in order to eradicate the negative thoughts.

Negative thoughts can be challenged and replaced with more positive thoughts, which will lead to more constructive coping responses to challenging situations (Bourne, 2012, n.p.; Edelman & Rémond, 2005, n.p.).

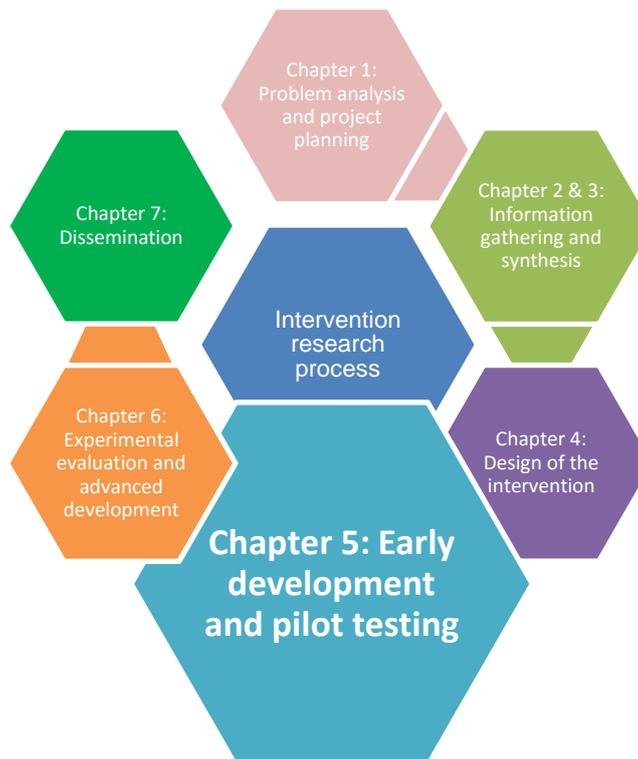
## **4.6 SUMMARY**

In this chapter, the components of a parenting programme were identified by comparing the 'ideal' parenting behaviours as described in literature, to the problems with regards to parenting in the target communities as disclosed by the focus groups. Twelve topics that address the three components were identified. For each topic a rationale was described, that stemmed from the deficits disclosed by the focus groups, followed by theoretical discussion of each topic. Implementing the parenting programme will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## CHAPTER 5

### IMPLEMENTING THE PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMME TO ENHANCE THE SCHOOL READINESS OF GRADE R LEARNERS

#### Phase 4: Early development and pilot testing



#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters the development of the proposed parenting programme was discussed. Three components were identified for this programme and twelve topics to address these components were described and motivated, which formed the prototype. This chapter contains a description of the content of the programme developed around the 12 topics as well as how early implementation of the prototype took place.

#### 5.2 COMPETENT PARENTING

According to Hoghghi (2004:10-13) competent parenting has four vital prerequisites. With regards to this parenting programme, the researcher aimed to support parents to gain these four prerequisites in the following ways:

<i>Knowledge and understanding</i>	Throughout the programme the researcher empowered the parents with written notes on all the topics, accompanied by verbal information on all the aspects of parenting and school readiness.
<i>Motivation</i>	Parents need to want to be good parents. In this case the parents needed to be made aware of how important school readiness was for their children's future, how they could contribute to this goal and be willing to co-operate. The researcher shared with the parents the importance of school readiness and what was meant by being school ready. The researcher put up a wall chart with the list of readiness criteria as described in the Training Manual for Grade R Educators of the Western Cape (2012:114) and pointed out to them what the social and emotional components were.
<i>Resources</i>	The parents were provided with all the resources that they needed to participate in all the activities and they took home with them resources to strengthen the training that they had received. Furthermore, the researcher continuously made the parents aware of how they could use resources in their immediate environment to enrich their children's development, resources that are easily accessible and which do not cost money. The researcher also emphasized to the parents that they could be the best parents available without education or the finances to purchase computers or expensive toys, because the important things that their children needed to become school ready could not be bought with money.
<i>Opportunity</i>	In the sessions the parents had the opportunity to interact with their children and to spend time together. The researcher explained to the parents the necessity to continue spending time and to interact with their children on a permanent basis at home. Judging from the feedback from the parents, it seems as if many parents discovered the pleasure of interacting with their children and that this continued at home after the programme. Parents' feedback on this issue will be given in Chapter 6.

### 5.3 SEQUENCE OF TOPICS

To motivate why these 12 topics were identified and how they supported the three components, each topic was discussed together with the related components in the previous chapter. However, for practical and other reasons the topics were not presented in the same sequence during the implementation as they were discussed in Chapter 4. The researcher presented the topics in the following sequence and the rationale for this decision is provided:

1. The five love languages
2. Building my child's self-esteem
3. Positive discipline
4. Helping children to deal with feelings

These first four topics form the crux of any good parenting. The researcher argued that, even if parents only attended these first four sessions, their children would already benefit much. After these sessions a session followed that was more focused on school readiness:

5. Developing self-control and delayed gratification

The last session of the school term was more informal and fun-filled, in order to break up on a lighter note for the Easter holiday:

6. Humour and fun.

After the Easter break the sessions addressed social and emotional development, as well as resilience in the following combination:

7. Teach your child to think positively
8. Social development as a component of school readiness
9. Developing an identity as a component of school readiness
10. Parent wellness
11. How to convey values to my child

The last session was a light-hearted one with fun activities to conclude the programme.

12. The importance of play in the development of school readiness.

#### **5.4 STRUCTURE OF THE PROGRAMME**

The researcher planned activities aimed at developing social and emotional school readiness skills as well as the development of physical and cognitive skills in such a combination that the participants would find each session different, stimulating and challenging. At the start of every session an information pack was handed out to the parents that included (amongst other) the following:

- One-pager notes on the specific topic that addressed the identified components of the parenting plan. The notes were written in understandable English and Afrikaans.
- A one page story with the content on the Grade R's level, to encourage reading. The researcher mostly made use of 'Lekkerbekkie' – stories that had been distributed by a company, AnnaEmm Kinderstories, free of charge and via e-mail, but other stories were also used. Each story was accompanied by a colouring page that the Grade R learners could colour in while the researcher addressed the parents. The Afrikaans stories were

translated into English by the researcher. The researcher tried to match the story to the topic of the session as far as possible. Parents' reading to their children is regarded in literature as one of the most important activities to build the parent-child relationship, as well as to stimulate cognitive, social and emotional development. Regular reading by parents to their children has been found to contribute to high approaches to learning, and the aim of including stories was to encourage parents to read to their children at home (Baker, Cameron, Rimm-Kaufman & Grissmer, 2012:847). In the same vein Baker (2013:194) found that the social skills as well as the mathematical and literacy skills of children in kindergarten (the USA equivalent of Grade R) improved when parents regularly engaged with them in early literacy activities, including shared book reading, singing and telling stories.

- The resource materials for the activities that the parents and Grade R learners were going to do.
- Any other encouraging or informative hand-outs related to the topic. Some of these hand-outs were not strictly academic/scientific, but fun and inspirational. These were printed on coloured paper to make the information pack colourful and interesting.

*Music:* During part 2 of each session, before parents and children started with the activities, a children's song was played and the researcher together with the parents and learners, sang and danced or made appropriate movements. Music is an important component of any early development programme and enhances language and mathematical development (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:117). Music has the power to improve relationships, accelerate learning and build self-esteem (Wilkinson, 2014:28). Singing and dancing is also a prominent item in other parenting programmes (Nabuco, *et al.*, 2014:566).

Each session consisted of two parts. The first part consisted of the welcoming, sharing the content of the information pack, and a discussion of the topic of the session. At schools P and N where the programme was presented on Saturdays, the Grade R learners were present in the sessions from the start, and they kept themselves busy colouring in while the researcher addressed the parents. After the discussion, there was a short break during which participants could help themselves to refreshments and visit the bathrooms. At school R where the learners were not present from the start, the parents fetched them from their classes at this point. Part two after the break consisted of the song of the day, doing group activities together (if any), and then the individual activities that the parents and their Grade R children continued with at their own pace.

## **5.5 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME**

Instead of presenting the parenting programme in two schools, School P and School N, as originally planned, the researcher, in consultation with her circuit manager and her study leader,

decided to present it to a third school in one of the target communities, School R. This turned out to be a positive decision, because it added to the number of participants who completed the programme.

The researcher decided to present the parenting programme shortly after the schools re-opened for the new school year, for two reasons:

- To ensure that the Grade R learners would derive maximum benefit from the programme for the rest of their Grade R year;
- The onset of the rainy season in the Western Cape was expected during the second term and poor weather is always a deterrent for parents who are dependent on public transport to attend events.

To invite parents of Grade R learners in the target schools to the programme, the researcher attended the parent meetings for Grade R parents shortly after the schools had reopened in the new year. The schools gave the researcher a time slot at the meetings to explain to the parents how important school readiness was and to invite them to attend. Thereafter the schools sent out letters to all the parents inviting them to the programme and providing details of where and when the sessions were going to be presented.

The researcher arranged to present the programme during the week in one target school and on Saturdays at two target schools, to give working parents the opportunity to attend. That meant that the Saturday groups attended two sessions bi-weekly. That gave the parents who worked during the week the opportunity to do their shopping and housework on the in-between Saturdays. This arrangement worked quite well. One mother remarked to the researcher that, as a working mother, it was quite a sacrifice for her to find the time to attend the sessions.

The logistics of the parenting programme worked out successfully. At school R where the sessions were presented during the week, the hall was always ready with tea cups, tables and chairs being put out. At school P and school N the situation was somewhat different. The researcher sometimes had to sit and wait in front of the school gate for the janitor to come and unlock the school on Saturday mornings. The researcher had to provide everything, including an urn and styrofoam cups for tea, a blanket and baby toys for infants who accompanied the parents, the information packs and resources for the programme. When the researcher was approaching school N for the first session of the Saturday programme, the researcher noticed that the robots were not working, indicating that load shedding was taking place in that area. The researcher realized then that, it was important to make a good impression, but the CD-player and urn would not work. However, things turned out well. The parents all knew the song (Hokey-Pokey) and sang along with enthusiasm and by tea time load shedding had stopped.

At all three schools where the programme was presented, many parents attended the first session, but then some parents failed to turn up again. This corresponds with the report of the social workers in the focus group who said that parents come to see what is happening at a parent group and then many of them disappear (SW1, SW2, SW3, SW4, SW5, SW6). A few parents offered an explanation. One mother sent an SMS explaining that her mother had been diagnosed with a terminal illness and that she could not continue. Another mother sent the message that she had found employment and that she would be working on Saturdays. The researcher sometimes received an SMS from a parent to notify the researcher that the parent would not be able to attend that week, but from the parents' side there was very little communication via the cellphone. The researcher never contacted parents to determine why they had dropped out, because during the first session the researcher had explained to the parents that participation was voluntary and that they could terminate attendance without owing the researcher an explanation.

Attendance was an aspect of the programme that concerned the researcher from the outset. The researcher started to send SMS's to all the parents the day before a session to remind them to attend (*'Dear Parent, please remember the next session of My Child is a Winner tomorrow at 9H00 at R... school. Hope to see you there. Kind regards, Jeanne'*). The parents never responded to the SMS's, so the researcher never knew whether the parents had received the SMS's. Sometimes the group started out with only six or seven parents present, then latecomers joined as the session progressed. McWey, Holtrop, Wojciak, and Claridge, (2015:1083) researched the reasons why so many parents dropped out of parenting programmes in the child welfare system in Florida, USA. They found that, apart from demographic factors, parents reported that they disagreed with the treatment approach. At pre-assessment, the 'drop-out' parents were found to be higher in negative maternal talk, lower in maternal praise and higher in harsh and inconsistent parenting. The researcher postulates that these parents may have found the course material too unfamiliar and incongruent with their own view on child rearing, to continue attending. Ultimately a small group of parents attended regularly, most of them every week and the impression was gained that they thoroughly enjoyed the sessions. The numbers of parents attending the first presentation of the programme were as follows:

Attendance of parenting programme by Participant groups 2 and 3			
Target school	Number of parents who attended 8 sessions or more	Number of parents who attended 6 sessions	Number of parents who dropped out after 2-4 sessions
School P	12	10	9
School R	14	1	6
School N	4	6	11

Attendance of the programme when it was repeated at School P the following year was the following:

Attendance of parenting programme by Participant groups 2 and 3			
Target school	Number of parents who attended 8 sessions or more	Number of parents who attended 6 sessions	Number of parents who dropped out after 2-4 sessions
School P	13	2	3

The total of parents attending 8 sessions or more at the three schools was 43.

## 5.6 CONTENT OF THE PROGRAMME

The parenting programme is the intervention tool developed within the framework of intervention research. It is the core of this research and it is presented in detail so that it can be used by social workers. The detailed parenting programme presented here, adds to the trustworthiness of the study as it encourages transferability. The parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners consisted of 12 sessions and entailed the following:

### SESSION 1

#### Component 1: Building the parent-child relationship

##### 5.6.1 Topic 1: The Five Love Languages

#### Resources

The five love languages – notes  
 Hokey-pokey Song for Children (from an unmarked CD that the School Enrichment Officer at the researcher's office gave to the researcher)  
 Story: Tin-Tin and the shark (by Corlie Putter)  
 Coloured crayons  
 Lotion, plastic cups, paper towels  
 Sweets and pretzels  
 Coffee, tea, sugar, urn, cups, teaspoons, cooldrink, cookies

#### Part 1

#### Introduction

At this first session the researcher:

- welcomed the participants and introduced herself.

- explained the consent form and ask parents to sign and obtain assent from their Grade R children.
- talked about logistics – tea break, toilet, etc.
- discussed the requirements for school readiness and put up the display chart. The researcher explained social and emotional learning and its effect on school readiness. It was not only reading, writing and mathematics that mattered at school, but also the social and emotional competence. The researcher discussed research done in the USA (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Shellinger, 2011:486) on the effect of social and emotional learning programmes (SEL-learning) and how 270,034 learners from Grade R to high school had gained an average of 11 percentile points in their academic achievement after doing the programme.

### **THE FIVE LOVE LANGUAGES**

Most parents dearly love their children, but many do not really know how to show it. Children do not know that they are loved if they do not hear, see and feel it. The 5 love languages are very easy, practical ways in which love can be demonstrated, not only by a parent to a child, but in any relationship. It is important to remember that each one of us has his or her own love language, in other words the language in which you want to give or receive love. Children also differ in the way in which they react to giving or receiving love. The five love languages are:

**Loving touch:** A child must learn what the right kind of touch feels like. Long before babies understand the meaning of the word love, they feel our love when we touch and hold them. Touching our children tells them that their bodies are precious. Most children love a hug, a touch on the shoulder or gentle rubbing of their shoulders or back. We should use every opportunity we have to touch our children.

**Words that build:** We as parents should only use words that build our children and make them feel good about themselves. Parents are so inclined to keep quiet when everything goes well and only speak when children do something wrong. We should watch out for opportunities to praise our child and mention by name what we are proud of.

**Quality time:** In this busy life many parents do not have adequate time to spend with their children. The result is that children get the message that they are not important. Quality time means that we do something together with our children that they enjoy. It also means that we set aside other things so that our child does not have to compete with the TV, the phone or other

people, but can enjoy our undivided attention. We should plan to make time to spend with our children to do things that all of us enjoy.

**Gifts:** Giving gifts is an expression of love. We do not have to buy expensive gifts, but now and then we can buy something small that our children like, even if it is only a small sweet. This shows our children that we thought of them when they were in school or somewhere else.

**Acts of service:** Parents are not their child's slaves and do not have to serve their children all the time. Children need to learn to contribute in the home by doing chores. However, something we can spoil our children with is breakfast in bed, or coffee when they are studying or during a holiday, as a special treat.

## Part 2

**Song:** Hokey pokey song for children.

Together with the movements this song develops children's knowledge of body parts, spatial orientation (left/right, in/out) and midline crossing.



**Song:** Hokey pokey song for children:  
You put your right foot in, you put your  
right foot out, you put your right foot in  
and you shake it all about  
Do the hokey pokey and you turn around  
That's what it's all about.

## Activities

Story: Tin-Tin and the shark

The researcher read the story and talked about it with the group. The Grade R children had to repeat the story to their parents shortly. The reason for this part was to demonstrate to parents how they can use the story to enhance their children's concentration and comprehension by asking questions:

- What did Tin-Tin want to do?
- Why was Tin-Tin scared of the shark?
- Did the shark eat Tin-Tin?
- What did Tin-Tin buy for the shark?

After this session it was left to the parents to read the story to their children at home.

## Touch activities

- Hand massage with lotion (Source: Theraplay® ([www.theraplay.org](http://www.theraplay.org)))
- Owl eye
- Eskimo kiss (with noses)

- Deep touch – pretend to wrap child in a towel and dry with slow strokes
- Treasure hunt (hand out sweets) (Source: Theraplay® ([www.theraplay.org](http://www.theraplay.org)))
- Weather forecast on child's back (Source: Theraplay® ([www.theraplay.org](http://www.theraplay.org)))
- Pretzels – parent and child eat from both sides.

## SESSION 2

### Component 2: Social and emotional development

#### 5.6.2 Topic 2: Building my child's self-esteem

##### Resources:

Notes: Building my child's self-esteem

Music: Ants go marching on (Toddler Actions Songs)

Story: Jamie and Scottie (by Anna Emm)

Envelopes, crayons, stickers.

Red hearts and scissors

Fishes game (Beaton, 2000)

##### Part 1

##### Discuss notes with parents:

### BUILDING MY CHILD'S SELF-ESTEEM

Self-concept refers to how I see myself and self-esteem refers to how I feel about myself. Am I good enough and a worthwhile person? As a parent it is one of our most important tasks to build our children's self-esteem.

Babies do not come into the world with high self-esteem. What happens to them after birth determines their self-esteem. Babies that are nurtured and well cared for, feel safe and important and learn that they are precious human beings. They feel good about themselves and about life itself, they have more energy to work hard and concentrate and they can build good relationships with other people. Children who feel good about themselves, will behave well, make wise choices and they will not feel the need to do naughty things to seek attention.

Children who are neglected and shouted at, learn that this world is a cruel place and that they cannot trust people. They learn from the way that people treat them that they are worthless and unimportant and they behave accordingly. If they learn in this way that they are worthless, they

might also not attach value to the lives of other people. When children do not receive love while they grow up, they will not be able to give love to others and when they enter into relationships with other people. They use relationships for their own good and not for the benefit of the other person. That is why we get so many unhappy marriages and parents who do not know how to show real love to their children.

How can we build our children's self-esteem?

- We need to apply the five love languages, touching our children daily in a loving way, using words that build them, spend time together and occasionally gifts and acts of service.
- Listen: When our children speak, it is very important that we should listen, look into our children's eyes, that we listen without interrupting them and do not judge before they have finished speaking. We should nod our head, make sympathetic sounds such as 'wow' to show them that we understand. We should then always first ask: 'How did that make you feel?' Or we can say: 'That must have been hard for you.' This will make our children feel special and important and show them that we think they are important enough that we want to hear their stories.
- Our expectations of our children should be according to their age and real abilities. We cannot expect of a young child to eat without messing a little bit or to sit still for a long time. When we support our young children in their development we will have much patience and never become angry or shout at them when they are trying to master new tasks. We should praise them for trying, not for getting something perfect.
- We should never label our children with words such as thief, liar, fighter or problem child. We should also never talk in a negative way about our children's appearance or abilities or label them as losers or no-good. Children believe what parents say about them and that influences the way they feel about themselves and the way they work and behave.
- We must respect our children as the unique, God-created beings that they are!

## Part 2

**Song:** The ants go marching on (Source: Toddler Action Songs). This marching song develops counting skills and the actions develop fine and gross motor muscles



The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah  
The ants go marching one by one, hurrah, hurrah  
The ants go marching one by one, the little one stops to play the drum  
And they all go marching down to the ground to get out of the rain, boom, boom, boom ...

The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah  
The ants go marching two by two, hurrah, hurrah ...

## Activity 1

Grade R learners decorate a 'brag bag' (A5 envelope) with their name, drawings and stickers. Parents receive a red cardboard heart on which to write their first love message to their children. The brag bag needs to be kept for positive messages, good reports, anything that builds the child's self-esteem. Parents were encouraged to occasionally write a positive message and add it to the content or make a note when someone like the educator has made a positive comment about learners.

## Activity 2

Play the fishes game, which teaches children visual discrimination (see annexure I).

## SESSION 3

### Component 2: Social and emotional development

#### 5.6.3 Topic 3: Positive discipline

##### Resources

Notes: Positive discipline  
Music: Two little blackbirds (Toddler Action Songs)  
Story: Andrew and the monkey (by Anna Emm)  
Breathing buddies (soft toys)  
Tape on progressive relaxation  
Blankets / towels to lie on  
Snakes and ladders boards, dices and discs  
Sticker charts for behaviour motivation (Pinterest)  
Carnival picture  
Crayons

##### Part 1

Discuss notes with parents

### POSITIVE DISCIPLINE

Most parents really love their children and they desire to teach them to be obedient children who know the difference between right and wrong and can apply this to their lives. However, many parents think that discipline consists of beating and yelling because this was the way that they were raised by their parents. They do not know that there are better ways of disciplining their children.

The word 'discipline' comes from the word 'disciple' in the Bible, which means follower. The disciples followed Jesus's example and imitated what He did. It is possible to raise a child successfully without violence and beating. Here are a few suggestions:

- Children should know the house rules and what is right and wrong. This makes them feel secure.
- We must always apply discipline consistently. What is wrong today, is wrong tomorrow, even when we feel tired and not in the mood to act.
- We should be role models of good behaviour. Our deeds speak louder than our words. Children observe very well what their parents do and imitate what they see.
- We should strengthen the bond of love between us and our children. A child who feels loved, tries to please the parent by obedience.
- We can use positive reinforcement – look out for positive behaviour and praise our children. We can tell them how happy it makes us. A child who receives such positive praise need not be naughty to receive attention. We should never bribe our children with money or gifts to let them behave themselves. Approval and kind words from us should be enough.
- We need to act quickly to put a stop to naughtiness and never allow our children to push us to breaking point.
- We can use consequences to discourage our children from being naughty. This means that a child will lose privileges or he will have to do extra chores when he is disobedient. For example, the child will not be allowed to watch TV or go and play outside if his homework is not done. When the child fights with other children, he must be withdrawn from the group until he is calm. Time-out also works well – one minute for each year of the child's age.
- The consequences must fit the child's age. A small child cannot sit in the room all afternoon.
- We should never withhold love to punish a child. Our children should know that we love them unconditionally.
- When we have punished our children for bad behaviour, the incident is over. We should not keep on reproaching children and reminding them of it.
- We should always treat our children with respect even when we are angry at them.
- We should NEVER shout at them or shove them around in front of other people!

## Part 2

Song: Two little blackbirds (Toddler Action Songs). This song promotes fine muscle development and concentration.



Two little blackbirds sitting on a wall  
The one's name is Jack, the other is Paul  
Fly away Jack, fly away Paul  
Come back Jack, come back Paul.

Two little blackbirds sitting on a wall  
The one's name is Jack, the other is Paul  
Go to sleep Jack, go to sleep Paul.

Parents had to draw two little bird faces on their own and on their children's index fingers. This game promotes fine motor development, because children need to change fingers when the birds 'fly away' or 'go to sleep' and when they 'return' or 'wake up'.

**Activity 1:** Progressive relaxation – notes and tape.

The progressive relaxation exercise is recommended by Lantieri (2008:42-49) to enhance emotional intelligence in children. It promotes body awareness, focusing skills and improved coping with stress. The relaxation CD for children aged 5-7 years contains a 6-minute guide to teach children deep breathing and relaxation from head to toe. For children to learn deep breathing, a soft toy (breathing buddy) was placed on each child's abdomen which moves up and down when the child breathes correctly. Parents needed to sit next to their children and guide them through the exercise. A written copy of the exercise was handed to the parents to repeat at home, preferable at night when they put their children to bed. The parents were also advised to use the relaxation exercises for themselves too.

**Activity 2:** Snakes and ladders.

Snakes and ladders is a century old game that originated in Nepal or India and was used as a tool to convey religious or cultural values. In ancient versions of the game the snakes represented various vices that could cause people to stray from the righteous path. The modern version is much simpler, but it is still a powerful teaching tool in its various forms (Bierend, 2015:n.p.).

Each parent and Grade R learner in the parenting programme was issued a laminated copy of the game 'Snakes and Ladders' as well as two dices. The game was explained and parents were cautioned to be patient with their children because they were not proficient in counting yet. They were also requested to allow their children to count the number of dots on the dices themselves. The game provided parents with quality time with their children and promoted number awareness in the Grade R's. The researcher also advised the parents to explain to their children that life for all people consists of ups and downs, but if one perseveres, things always improve again. In the game the children needed to persevere even when they did slide down with the snakes several times. In the end they would always reach the top.

**Activity 3:** Carnival picture (see example in annexure I): The A3 picture had the scene of a carnival with several sets of twin children playing around. The Grade R learners had to circle sets of twins with the same colours. This exercise enhances visual discrimination which is a vital skill for learning to read and write.

## SESSION 4

### Component 2: Social and emotional development

#### 5.6.4 Topic 4: How to help my child deal with feelings.

##### Resources

Notes: How to help my child deal with feelings

Music: If you're happy and you know it (no source)

Story: Thomas goes to the moon (by Corlie Putter)

Coloured cardboard, faces, feelings words, washing pegs, paper punch, string

Bubble plastic

Newspapers

Balloons

Coloured discs and cups

##### Part 1

Discuss topic with parents

### HELPING CHILDREN TO DEAL WITH FEELINGS

Feelings play a very important role in every person's daily life. When I feel happy, life is good, I am friendly with people and I have much energy to spend doing my work. When I am depressed or angry, it influences the way I treat people as well as my attitude towards my work. I cannot concentrate, I am rude to people and I cannot face the day.

All people are born with a variety of feelings such as joy, anger and fear. Some people experience their feelings more intense than other people. There are no good and bad feelings. Feelings such as fear and anger are normal and they also play a role in people's lives. What makes feelings right or wrong, is the way in which we express those feelings and whether we do damage in the process or not.

Before we can help our children with their feelings, it is important that we are aware of our own feelings. How would you feel if:

- someone gives you orders and bosses you around? .....
- someone trusts you? .....
- someone thinks that he is more important than you? .....

- you stand in a long queue and someone pushes in in front? .....
- you realise you have let someone down? .....
- someone gives you a lovely compliment? .....
- someone blames you for something that you did not do? .....

Children are not born to know how to deal with their feelings, they have to learn it. Feelings and behaviour are closely associated with each other. When children experience intense feelings that they do not understand or that scares them, they sometimes express these feelings through bad behaviour. Nail biting, bedwetting, stamping of feet, stealing, fighting with other children, rude words are all signs of strong feelings that children do not know how to express in other ways. When children display bad behaviour, we need to ask ourselves: *What does the child want to say through this behaviour?* or *What feelings is my child experiencing?*

The following guidelines can help parents to support their children to express their feelings in a healthy way:

- Be a good role model of self-control. If we do not control our feelings, how on earth can we expect our children to learn to do it?
- We need to help our children to get to know their feelings and how their bodies and hearts feel: 'I can see you are unhappy, what happened?' This makes children feel that we understand them. In this way they learn to become aware of and identify their own feelings. When I am angry, my hands make fists and when I feel shy or scared, I feel as if I want to cry.
- We need to teach our children the right words for feelings, so that they can say in words how they feel. Naming is taming. We need to expand their feelings language and teach them different words for different feelings (happy: excited, joyful or angry: annoyed, frustrated, livid).
- Then we need to show our children healthy ways to express their feelings. Children should never be allowed to be rude and disobedient when they do not feel well. We can encourage them to do something to get rid of the bad feelings – see below.

Suggestions what children may do to express their feelings:

**Very happy:** laugh, dance, clap hands, sing, jump

**Sad:** cry, talk about the reason, draw a picture, lie on the bed a little, phone grandmother, write a letter, come to parent for a hug

**Scared:** talk to someone, run away, draw, come to parent for a hug

**Angry/jealous/disappointed:** breathe deeply, count to ten, box a pillow or shout in a pillow, sword fight with newspapers, kick a balloon, talk about it, crumple paper, kick a ball, come to the parent for a hug. It is important to remember that anger always hides other feelings, such as frustration, jealousy or pain. We need to find out what that other feeling is in order to find a solution.

**Exercise is always a wonderful way for people of all ages to get rid of bad feelings – walk, jog, kick a ball. It is important to teach children that they are not allowed to hurt themselves, other people, animals or things when something makes them unhappy.**

## Part 2

**Song:** If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands. This song encourages the expression of emotions in an appropriate way.



If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands  
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands  
If you're happy and you know it and you really want to show it  
If you're happy and you know it, clap your hands.

If you're happy and you know it, stamp your feet, ...  
If you're happy and you know it, shout hurrah ...  
If you're happy and you know it, do all three ...

*Then the researcher added one more verse:*  
If you're sad and you know it, you can cry, boo hoo ...

**Activity 1:** Numeracy activity with coloured wheels (see annexure I).

A plastic cup with 10 wheels of different colours was issued to each parent-child dyad. The suggestions to the parents were to let their children count altogether, count each colour, identify which was most/least, arrange in groups of 5, put most on top and least at the bottom, left/ right. This activity teaches children to count, to identify colours and to learn quantity and spatial positions.

**Activity 2:** Make a feelings chart (see annexure I)

Parents and their Grade R children pasted round faces with different emotional expressions on coloured cardboard and pasted the names of the feelings next to the faces. Parents needed to ask their children to first identify the feelings before adding the names. It was suggested to them that they add other names for the same feelings to expand their children's feelings vocabulary. A clothing peg was given along and could be used to indicate how the child was feeling at any

moment in order to talk about it: How do you feel? What happened to make you sad? What can we do to make you feel a little better?

Several resources to release feelings were then distributed: bubble plastic, balloons and newspapers for making play swords.

## SESSION 5

### Component 2: Social and emotional development

#### 5.6.5 Topic 5: Teaching my child self-control and delayed gratification

##### Resources

Notes: Teaching our children self-control and delayed gratification

Notes: Routine

Notes: Activities to develop the thinking brain

Music: John Brown's baby (Toddler Action Songs)

Story: Froggie's Birthday (by Anna Emm)

Dots stickers and colouring pages

Robot picture with coloured circles

Bags with objects (including cotton balls, washing pegs, chalk and pebbles)

Crayons, glue stick and scissors

Tea, coffee, cookies, urn

##### Part 1

Discuss topic with parents.

### TEACHING OUR CHILDREN SELF-CONTROL AND DELAYED GRATIFICATION

What is self-control? It is the ability to control our attention, our feelings and our behaviour when we badly want something now, but we know it is wiser to wait for something better later on. The opposite of self-control is impulsivity. Children who can control their attention, their feelings and their behaviour do better in school and they can work towards long-term goals. Self-control plays an even bigger role than personality in how children do in school. The effect of good self-control also extends into adulthood with better economic, social and emotional outcomes for the individual. Other words for self-control are willpower, self-discipline and self-regulation.

The marshmallow experiment: In the sixties a psychologist Dr Mischel, did an experiment with young children. He put them in a room and put a plate with one marshmallow on it in front of them. He told them that, if they could wait to eat the marshmallow until he came back, they would get another marshmallow. He then left them alone for 15 minutes. Some children could not wait and ate theirs immediately. Others could wait and got another marshmallow. Many years later Dr Mischel and his students followed up this group of children and found that the children who could wait, not only did much better in school, but also did better in their social relationships and in their later careers. This is called the principle of delayed gratification.

We know that young children are all active, curious and impulsive little beings. We cannot expect of them to always control their impulses and that is why we need to guide and control them until they are old enough to do it themselves out of their own free will. Self-control will help our children to say no to risk behaviours later (instant gratification) such as smoking, dropping out of school, early sexual activity and substance abuse.

### **Ways to teach children self-control**

- We need to be **good role models** of self-control. Our actions speak louder than our words. If we are frustrated and angry, we need to take a deep breath and control our words and actions. We should also be good models of delayed gratification, in other words to put off small immediate rewards for later, larger rewards. When we talk to our children about something that we want, we need to tell them that although we really want something badly, we have decided to wait until we can buy it cash or that we will rather save the money for school fees.
- **Parenting style:** Research shows that parents who are warm and loving, who communicate often with their children and who exercise strict discipline without beating children (authoritative parenting), get the best results.
- We can apply the principles of **positive discipline** as described in the previous teaching.
- We can also apply the principles of helping our children to **deal with their feelings** as in previous teaching.
- Very important is to establish a **set routine** at home. We need to teach children that there are fixed times for getting up, going to bed, homework, playtime, bath time and mealtimes. We must agree on set times for watching TV and we only switch the TV on at those times. We need to see that they stick to the rules – homework before play, no sweets before supper, no desert if children do not finish their food or pick up and clean up after play. We can encourage children to take responsibility for their own routine, e.g. by teaching them how a watch or an alarm clock works, so that they can time their own TV watching or know when it is time to go to bed. We need to remember that young children still need constant monitoring. The advantage of a set routine is that children get to know their own body rhythms – when they are tired or when they are hungry. Bedtime rituals should include a

cuddle and a story. Mealtimes can also be accompanied by rituals such as saying grace and sharing the stories of the day. Routines must be flexible enough that children can adapt when something unexpected happens. Refer to hand-out (see below).

- We need to give children the opportunity for **social development**. Activities in small groups of two or more give our children the opportunity to practice social skills such as sharing, taking turns and having empathy for others. Activities such as drama and imaginary play, train them to focus on their roles, adapt to others and to take others' interests into account.
- **Sports, dance and music** create the opportunity for children to learn to stick to rules and adapt to other people. A healthy body improves brain development.
- We can give our children the opportunity to make **controlled decisions**, e.g.: Do you want your pocket money now, or do you want to save it for the holiday in two weeks' time? If we give children time-out, we can let them decide when they want to say that they are sorry so as to rejoin the group.
- We can give our children a **future perspective** so that they know what to expect in the short and in the long term. If we go to the shop with them, we should tell them beforehand that there will be no sweets. We can also start early to help build a dream for our children about their future – what is their dream for when they grow up?
- Playing **stop/freeze games** as well as other games that require focus and concentration, also build self-control – clap once when you see a red car and shout 'red!'

Together with the discussion on developing self-control, a suggested evening routine illustrated with pictures, was handed out.

## Part 2

Music and song: John Brown's baby (Toddler Action Songs). This song requires concentration, because with each consecutive verse a word is replaced by an action, so that in the end most of the nouns and verbs have been replaced by actions.



John Brown's baby has a cold upon his chest  
John Brown's baby has a cold upon his chest  
John Brown's baby has a cold upon his chest  
And they rub it in with camphorated oil.

John Brown's ... has a cold upon his

**Story:** Froggie's birthday

### **Activities to develop the thinking brain**

This collection of word games to stimulate cognitive development was translated from the work of Du Plessis (2014:94-95), and it consists of games that can be played anywhere without involving money or tangible resources. The researcher discussed this handout and demonstrated one of the games with a parent or with an assistant (if one was available).

#### **ACTIVITIES TO DEVELOP THE THINKING BRAIN**

Adapted from: 'Maak gelukkige kinders groot' by Lizanne du Plessis

These games are free, they contribute to the child's brain development and they can be played anywhere.

- **Stories:** When you read your child a story, ask the child to repeat the story to you, ask how this or that happened, why it happened, etc.
- **Role play:** For children to pretend to be a mommy, a teacher or a fireman, gives them the opportunity to think, because they have to act differently from normal. This teaches them adaptability and empathy. To pretend to be a helpless baby who cannot do anything for himself, is a good strategy when the child wants us to do something for him like dressing him, although we know he can do it himself.
- **Fantasy play:** Pretend that a brush is a microphone or a broom is a horse.
- **'I see with my little eye'-games:** something that is red/blue/soft, something that rhymes with hot.
- **'I went to the shop...':** Each player mentions one thing that he bought at the shop, the next player must mention that thing and add one thing, the next player must mention all the things and add another.
- **Bright ideas:** Think of any object such as a scarf. Think of all the things that one can do with the scarf, such as tying something, skipping, walking tightrope, wrap something in it, using it as an umbrella when it rains. Even if all the ideas are not possible, it is still a good exercise.
- **'Wrong word'-game:** This game does not really have rules. Twist all the words and say, for example: 'Do you want the blue cup?' while you are actually holding the red cup. 'Shall we sand your feet with sanding paper?' 'Do you want to use the garden spade to eat your food?' or 'Shall I dry you before you get into the bath?'
- **'Wrong way around'-games:** Turn everything around. Example: play snakes and ladders from the top to the bottom, go up with snakes and down with ladders. When you play:

'Simple Simon says...', the child must do the opposite to what Simon says. When Simon says rub your back, they must rub their tummy.

- **The 'Why' or 'What'-game:** Children love to ask why and what and we normally answer their questions. Now and again we can turn it around and ask: 'Why do you think?' or 'What do you think?'
- **The pretend game:** Suitable for all ages. 'Let us pretend we are walking in a forest and suddenly we hear a growl. What shall we do?' 'Pretend we get home and a huge dinosaur is eating our plants. What shall we do?' 'Pretend we are walking in the road and here comes an ant that is growing larger and larger. He is wearing dark glasses and he has a red cap on his head. What shall we do?' This is an ideal tactic to divert a child's attention when he is feeling tired or grumpy.

## Part 2

**Activity 1:** Learners pasted the dots and coloured in – fine motor exercise to pull off and paste small round stickers onto colouring pages with many small circles and colour on the rest of the page (see annexure I).

**Activity 2:** Run/stop with robot. Parents assisted their children in cutting out and pasting a red, yellow and green circle on a picture of a robot. The group then went outside and parents had to do a 'Red/yellow/green'-running exercise with their children. The explanation was given that children had to physically experience running, slowing down and freezing, as suggested by Leong and Bedrova (2003:4). Afterwards the children were asked to be quiet for a moment, feel their heart beat and become aware of their breathing (see annexure I for robot).

**Activity 3:** Mindfulness exercise as suggested by Lantieri (2008:54) to teach children to focus and pay attention. Each parent was issued with a brown paper bag with a number of items of contrasting size and texture in it. Items included items from nature, cotton wool, a clothes peg, marble, two small sweets, a small plastic fish, a piece of chalk and a small stone. The parents had to hold the opening slightly open to allow their children to slip in their hands and feel what was inside. The children had to guess what each item was, by feeling it before removing it from the bag.



(*Photograph 1: Dad and daughter busy with the mindfulness exercise.*)

The parents had to hold the opening slightly open to allow their children to slip in their hands and feel what was inside. The children had to guess what each item was, by feeling it before removing it from the bag.

**Activity 4:** Draw a hopscotch and play: The parents were shown a drawing of the outdoors game of hopscotch. They used the piece of chalk and the small stone from the mindfulness bag to draw hopscotch on a paved area of the school and to teach their children to play the game.



(Photograph 2: Parents and Grade R learners playing hopscotch.)

## SESSION 6

### Component 2: Social and emotional development

#### 5.6.6 Topic 6: Social development as a component of school readiness

##### Resources

Music: Kind and gentle (researcher's own words)

Notes: Social development as a component of school readiness

Other notes:

- Kind and gentle song
- Recipe for play dough
- Reading tips for parents (Reading Rockets)
- Hand-out on resilience (Grotberg, 1995:8-10)
- Social skills colouring picture (Pinterest)

Story: The boat race (Corlie Putter)

Picture of house and tree and play dough – take home

Paper plates and marbles

Pictures for paper 'puzzles'

A3 paper + pics of farm animals

Coffee/tea/cookies and urn.

## Part 1

Discuss notes with parents

### **SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AS A COMPONENT OF SCHOOL READINESS**

Children's social development is an important part of being school ready and it plays a big role in how well they adapt in school. Even their social functioning plays a role in how well they do in their school work, because schools are social places, and learning is a social process. Children have more energy to pour into their school work if they get along with friends and understand how relationships work.

Two classes of social skills necessary for school readiness have been identified:

- *Learning-related social skills*, which included listening and following directions, participating well in groups, focusing on the work and finishing tasks, taking responsibility, working independently and behaving well; and
- *Interpersonal social skills*, including good relationships with friends and classmates, sharing and respecting others.

Parents play a major role in the development of their children's social skills. It starts the day that children are born and they become involved in a relationship with their parent or caregiver, as well as with siblings and other family members. If parents are loving and care well for their children, the children learn that it is safe to have relationships with different people and they carry this attitude over to relationships in school.

#### **Tips for parents to improve their children's social skills:**

**Dealing with feelings in a healthy way:** (Previous session).

**Exercise self-control:** (Previous session).

**Good communication:** We should teach children how to make eye contact, speak clearly, smile and say clearly what they want or need. Say 'Please' and 'Thank you'. We can talk about how to approach a group to ask them to join the group, as well as how to play with a friend during break.

**Empathy:** Children need to learn to understand and have respect for other people's feelings and needs. We should ask them how another child would feel if this or that happens. We can teach

them that everybody has feelings and can feel hurt or sad when things go wrong. This will prevent children from feeling that only their feelings matter.

**Sharing and taking turns:** These skills start at home when children have to share with siblings. We need to explain to them that all of us need to share and take turns.

**Practicing social scripts:** This means teaching children what to do and what to say in different social situations, such as going shopping or going to the clinic, being a guest, visiting someone who is sick, or receiving friends at home. Talking about this, gives children an understanding of what to expect and how to behave. There are many social scripts on television that are rude and crude. We need to expose our children to polite social scripts - in real life situations, in pretend play and in books and child friendly television programmes.

**Problem-solving:** Children must learn to talk if they feel unhappy about something. We can talk to them about the problem, look at it from different angles and consider different options to solve it. They can then choose the best option and learn to bear the consequences of their choice. Children need to learn that they have choices and therefore decision-making powers regarding their behaviour.

**Dealing with conflict:** Conflict is very common in children's interaction and if they can learn to solve conflict in a healthy way, these skills will help them at home and in the workplace throughout their life. It is much easier to learn effective and respectful conflict resolution skills as a child than it is to learn it as an adult. Unless children are in danger, we should not remove them from the conflict situation, but rather help them to resolve the difference. We can teach them the power of talking instead of fighting, and discuss with them fairness and rules. They also need to learn to respect other children's feelings and rights, even if they do not agree and they need to learn to say sorry if they were wrong.

**Teaching responsibility:** At home children need to be responsible for tasks within their ability. They need to learn to take care of themselves and to clean up after playing. They also need to do meaningful work such as lay the table or fold the washing. Whether they have success or failure, we need to be supportive and we need to thank them. Children also need to learn to be good citizens, respect public places, and contribute to the welfare of the community. We should always have high hopes for our children.

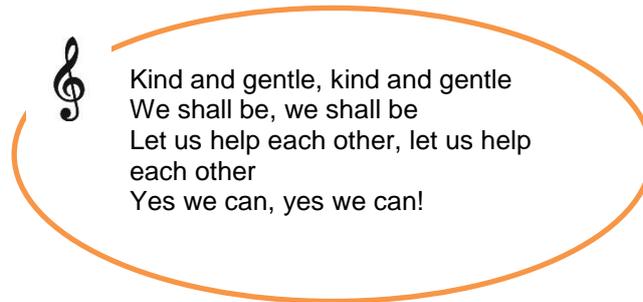
**Team sports and good sportsmanship:** Team sports can build effective social skills only if we explicitly teach our children to be a good sportsman, by reminding them before a game, of the following goals of good sportsmanship:

- Be a good winner (not bragging/teasing the losers; provide support to the losers);

- Be a good loser (congratulating the winner; not blaming others for the loss);
- Show respect for the rules of the game, for other players, and for the referee;
- Show encouragement and offer help to other players who may be less skilled;
- Resolve conflicts without running to the teacher.

## Part 2

Song: Kind and gentle (to the tune of Frère Jacques, Frère Jacques/Vader Jakob, Vader Jakob.



**Activity 1:** Play dough and pictures to take home. Each child received a picture printed on coloured paper with many small circles on and a small ball of play dough. They were shown to roll small balls of play dough and paste them on the circles to promote fine motor development (see annexure I).

**Activity 2:** Puzzle search. To promote cooperation, parent and children worked in teams to find the missing pieces of the paper puzzles that were cut up and distributed amongst the teams. The puzzles were different scenes but of the same colour, so that the participants had to look carefully and identify the pictures. This activity required of them to connect with other parents and children. (See attachment for example of paper puzzle)

**Activity 3:** Race with paper plates and marbles. The Grade R learners were divided into teams of two. The teams raced against each other, walking from one end to the other end, holding a paper plate with a marble on, without letting the marble fall. The team who first deposited three marbles into a dish, won.

**Activity 4:** Group drawing of a farm. In the resource pack were pictures of farm animals. Each team (parent and child) had to design and draw a farm, consult with each other on where the farm house, barn, pastures, etc. should be. Then they had to draw the buildings and paste the animal pictures.



(Photograph 3: Learners displaying their farmyard pictures)

## SESSION 7

### Component 2: Social and emotional development

#### 5.6.7 Topic 7: Identity development

##### Resources

Notes: Developing an identity as part of school readiness

'Draw-a-stick-man'-exercise

Music: This old man (sang from memory)

List of body parts and questions to discuss

Little eyes see (source unknown)

Story: Froggie and Buggie (Anna Emm)

Pens

Wool, glue stick, crayons, mirrors, A2-outlines

Tea, coffee, milk, cookies, urn, cups

##### Part 1

Discuss notes with parents

#### DEVELOPING AN IDENTITY AS PART OF SCHOOL READINESS

Developing an identity means that children discover: 'Who am I?', 'Is it ok to be who I am?' and 'What is my place in the world?' Finding answers to these questions is very important for a child's well-being.

The process of developing an identity, begins when small children become aware of themselves and discover that they are unique and separate from other people. This process continues throughout their childhood and becomes a point of focus during the teenage years, but it can be a lifelong journey.

There are many different aspects of identity, including:

**Legal identity:** 'Identity' is a legal concept within the UN *Convention on the Rights of the Child*. It is every child's entitlement from birth. Children should be registered immediately after birth and they should have the right from birth to have a name, the right to acquire a nationality and, as far as possible, the right to know and be cared for by his or her parents (United Nations, 1989, Article 7.1) Registering a child's birth and getting him a birth certificate is the best evidence of respect for that child's identity.

**Body image:** Young children's bodies develop very fast between birth and 6 years of age, and it is important that they get plenty of exercise to develop their small and large muscles. When children learn to use and control their bodies, they become independent of their parents, which gives them a feeling of achievement. A parent's loving touch and approval during these years is extremely important to help children feel positive about their bodies and to accept themselves as they are. Children need to discover how much they resemble their parents, but also how unique they are.

**Gender identity:** During the early years children identify with one of their parents to develop a sexual identity. Usually boys identify with daddies and girls identify with their moms, wanting to dress like that parent and by imitating that parent. When parents place a lot of emphasis on gender roles, it teaches children that certain jobs are only for boys/girls and this restricts children's choice of careers later on.

**Cultural/Family identity:** The family and environment in which children grow up, play a major role in the shaping of their identity. Children need to feel that they belong to a family. In this process parents play an important role in the way that they accept their children unconditionally, and make them feel that they have roots and that they are part of a loving support network of relatives. Parents can establish a family identity by creating a positive atmosphere and through family rituals that they uphold, like birthday celebrations. When parents follow their cultural or religious beliefs and customs, children are more inclined to follow these when they grow up.

**Moral identity:** This includes children's values and their understanding of what is right and what is wrong. (This topic will be discussed in another session.)

**Social identity:** Children experience that they have the skills to make friends and to be accepted or not. They desperately need to be accepted by their peers. (Discussed in previous session.)

**Ideal self:** In many cases, the way people see themselves and how they would like to see themselves, do not quite match. Young children's idea of themselves is sometimes still mixed up with fantasy and when they play, their desire to be powerful and strong is displayed. Children with a positive identification with one or both parents and a close bond with parents, tend to have the confidence that they will eventually be able to do things just as well as their parents can. When they feel small and vulnerable, their belief that their parents are big and strong, makes them feel safe. It is important that parents give their children the assurance that they are growing up and that they will be strong and clever one day.

### Activities

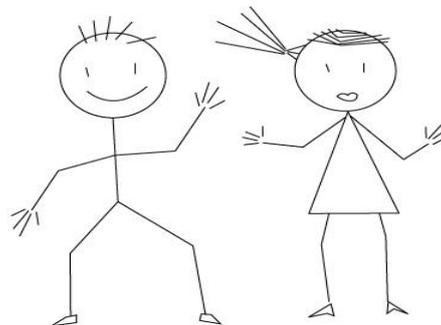
Song: This old Man. This song promotes numeracy and children's knowledge of body parts.

This old man, he played one, he played knick-knack on my drum  
With a knick-knack paddy whack, give a dog a bone  
This old man came rolling home.



This old man, he played two, he played knick- knack on my shoe,  
With a knick-knack paddy whack, give a dog a bone ...  
This old man came rolling home.  
Up to 10.

**Activity 1:** Parents complete the 'draw-a-stick-man' questions with their children. School ready children need to be able to draw a stick figure and identify their own body parts.



My name is .....

My surname is .....

I am ..... years old

My address is .....

My daddy's name is .....

His cell phone number is .....

My mommy's name is .....

Her cell phone number is .....

**Activity 2:** Complete the booklet with exercises of body parts and other writing exercises (or take home activity) (see annexure I for examples).

**Activity 3:** Parent and child complete the outline of the child. De Witt (2016:126) quotes Gordon and Browne (1989:526) who described the following components of self-esteem:

- sense of identity
- sense of belonging
- sense of uniqueness
- sense of self.

This activity was deemed suitable for strengthening identity formation and also to build self-esteem by promoting the four needs mentioned above. The activity was done on an A2 cardboard with the outline of a body drawn on it. The parents were instructed to assist their children in completing the outline to resemble the child. Together with their children they had to look in a mirror and study the parent and child's features. The parent had to comment to the child whom he/she resembled – parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, and then complete that body part by pasting on wool, drawing the face and cutting clothes from magazines. It was emphasized that the end product was not important, but the process of discovering that, on the one hand the child resembled family and belonged to a family, but on the other hand he was also unique.



(Photograph 4: Identity activity.)

## SESSION 8

### Component 2: Social and emotional development

#### 5.6.8 Topic 8: Moral Development

##### Resources

Music: Twinkle, twinkle little star (Toddler Action Songs)

Notes on topic: How do I teach my children values

Other notes:

- Plant your spiritual garden  
(<http://kubik.org/lighter/garden.htm>)
- How to say NO! (source unknown)
- Parents - numeracy and literacy
- Writing exercises

Story: Daniel and the lions' den

Story: Freddy Farm Dog (by Corlie Putter)

Coloured balloon shapes on cardboard (4)

Blue A4 cardboard

Tea, coffee, sugar, cookies, cups, urn

## Part 1

Discuss notes with parents

### HOW DO I TEACH MY CHILD VALUES

Many people today are concerned about society, because it seems as if life is becoming more immoral and without values. Even government is placing our children in a moral dilemma with frequent corruption of government officials as well as the legalization of things like pornography and abortion.

When children are young, they obey their parents because they are scared of being punished if they do something naughty. They accept the values that the parents teach them. Then they grow older and they come into contact with new ideas and values, especially when they go to high school. They start to question what their parents taught them, and they have to decide for themselves what values they believe in. Because they are in the process of becoming independent of their parents and have the freedom to move around more on their own, they come in situations where they must decide for themselves whether they are going to do the right thing, even when their parents are not near. That is why some teenagers choose the wrong path for a while, but if they received a good upbringing and have a loving relationship with their parents, chances are good that they will return to the values that their parents taught them. Then they do the right thing out of choice, and not because they are scared of their parent.

Children must not only know what is right, they must make those values their own and grow up with a deep respect for and dedication to what is right. What can I as a parent do to teach my child good values and to inspire him/her to live out those values? Here are a few suggestions:

- I can live out the values that I regard as important. My example speaks louder than words.
- I must build my children's self-esteem and bind them to me with cords of love. This will give them the courage to always stand up for what is right. Children who have a low self-esteem and are hungry for love, will not have the guts to stand up for what is right in their friendship circle, because they will do what their friends do to seek acceptance and feel part of the group.
- I must maintain healthy boundaries/discipline at home. I can praise my children for good behaviour and hold them responsible for what they do.
- I must talk to my child about the positive consequences of good values and the negative consequences of wrong values. I can discuss moral dilemmas such as, what they should do when they see a friend stealing; tell the teacher or protect their friend.

- I can use everyday situations to talk about values – the news, newspaper, what is happening to me or my children, or in the community.

**Activities**

Song: Twinkle, twinkle, little star. This was the favourite song of the late president Mandela. The song strengthens fine motor coordination.



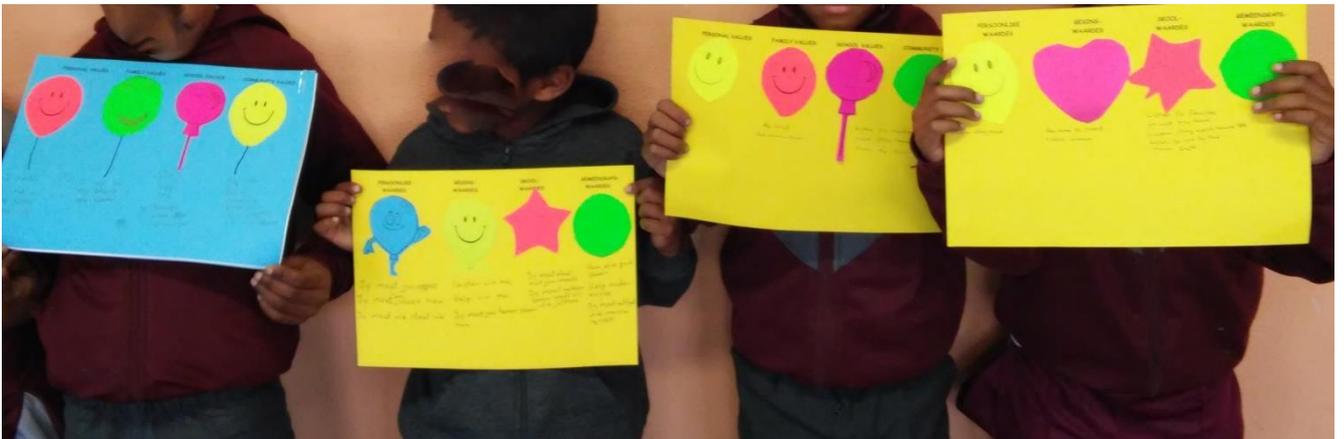
Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are  
 Up above the world so high, like a diamond in the sky  
 Twinkle, twinkle little star, how I wonder what you are!

Activity 1: Cut and paste cardboard balloons on cardboard and talk about the values in 4 areas before writing it under each balloon:

Personal values, family values, school values and community values.

Discuss ‘How to say NO!’ (see annexure I)

Complete writing activity if there is time or take it home (see annexure I for examples).



(Photograph 5: Grade R learners with their balloon values picture)

**SESSION 9**

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**

**5.6.9 Topic 9: The value of play in the school readiness of Grade R learners.**

**Resources**  
 Notes: The importance of play in the development of school readiness

Other notes:

- Homework
- Ten ways to be a good dad
- Page with writing exercises

Story: The Girl who beat the Worry Monster (written by the researcher)

Picture of tree and monsters

Mask pictures, glitter pens, glitter, dots, colouring pens, Glue stick, scissors, elastic

'A Kit to Cheer You Up' for parents

Tea, coffee, sugar, cookies, cooldrink, cups, urn

## Part 1

Discuss notes with the parents

### THE IMPORTANCE OF PLAY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SCHOOL READINESS

Young children live to play. Play is fun, joyful, natural, and necessary for developing HEALTHY brains. The first form of play is when babies start to babble and throw their toys out of the cot. In today's world there is much pressure on parents to help their children to do well at school. That is why parents sometimes put pressure on their children to take part in after school activities and extra classes and why there is sometimes little time left for play.

Children do not only play for fun, but they learn important life skills in a natural way. They sometimes need to play without expensive toys, electronic devices or the television. Parents should create opportunities for their children to play. It is important that children be allowed to choose what they want to play. If parents want to join them in playing, this is wonderful, but parents should never interfere and try to take control.

#### **There are different types of play:**

*Playing alone:* Children need to learn to entertain themselves and keep themselves busy. This helps them to become self-sufficient.

*Watching others play:* Children learn through watching other children at play and this is a normal kind of 'play'.

*Playing alongside a playmate:* The children each do their own thing, but they watch each other and talk to each other. This is the start of playing together.

*Playing together:* This happens when children start to cooperate by playing the same game together, like building with blocks or playing house.

**Play helps children develop in several areas, including:**

- *Brain development:* Some experts say that preschool children learn more from play than they would in the classroom. Play, movement, and exploration encourage the growth of brain cells that improve brain activities such as thinking, decision-making and problem-solving. Play stimulates curiosity, fantasy, and imagination that form the basis of creativity and which would improve future math and science skills.
- *Language skills:* At first children talk to themselves when they play and later they talk to each other. They practise new vocabulary and learn to communicate with others.
- *Social skills:* Through play children make friends and learn to get along with other children. They learn to cooperate, to share, to take turns and to follow the rules. They look at other children playing and they learn to imitate what they see.
- *Physical development:* Playing games such as pick-up-sticks develops the small muscles of the hand in preparation for writing. When children play physically active games, such as running, climbing, jumping or balancing, they strengthen their large muscles and improve their coordination.
- *Emotional development:* Play builds children's self-esteem and gives them the self-confidence they need to build relationships, understand different things and make sense of the world around them. It gives them the opportunity to relax and escape from the real world for a while.
- *Exploration skills:* Children use their five senses to investigate and learn about the world. They are naturally curious and need opportunities to explore new and different things.

**A few examples of games that children love to play are:**

**Outdoors**

- Mud or sand and water, building a farm in the sand with twigs, stones, tree bark and leaves
- Climbing – trees, jungle gyms, stairs
- Ball games and other sports
- Running, jumping, balancing, climbing, playing hide and seek, hopscotch
- Discovering nature – investigate, plant something and watch it grow, learn the life cycle of moths and other insects, explore nature and look for 'treasures' in the veld
- Organised games, e.g. 'I had a dog, his name was Puff' ('vroteier'), 'crabs and crows', 'touchies'.

## Indoors

- Playing with household items such as pots, pans, wooden spoon, plastic cups and bowls, empty boxes
- Building houses with chairs, blankets and cushions
- Fantasy play/role play – with scarves, old clothes, hats, masks, paper bags. Here improvisation is important – use a spice bottle for a microphone to give a show, etc.
- Word games (see *Activities to develop the thinking brain*)
- Games with rules, e.g. board games, snakes and ladders, ludo, pick-up-sticks, monopoly, card games e.g. snap, donkey.

## Part 2

**Activity 1:** Worry monsters. The researcher wrote a story about a Grade R learner who could not sleep because of worrying about Grade 1, until she could confide in her mother, who comforted her and set her mind at ease. The parents read that story to their Grade R children and then cut out and paste small red monsters on a picture of a tree. The parents could explain to their children that, if they talked about worry monsters and pasted them on the tree, the monsters became less scary (see annexure I)

**Activity 2:** Games:

- 'I had a dog, his name was Puff' (vroteier)
- Musical chairs

**Activity 3:** Masks: Children received masks to cut out and decorate with stickers, drawings and glitter.



(Photograph 6: Four Grade R learners with their masks.)

## SESSION 10

### Component 3: Resilience

#### 5.6.10 Topic 10: Humour and fun

##### Resources

Notes: Humour and fun

Music: Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy? (Toddler Action Songs)

Notes on jokes

Story: Peter the Farm Mouse's Car (by Corlie Putter)

Buttons for sorting and counting

Face paint + lotion + ear buds + paper towels + mirrors

Finger paint, paper, paper towels

##### Part 1

Discuss notes with parents

### HUMOUR AND FUN

Life is not always easy, but it can be made much more pleasant through humour. A good sense of humour can be learnt and can already develop during childhood. When we laugh at something funny, our brain secretes 'feel good' chemicals that greatly benefit our bodies. The value of fun and humour in the development of children cannot be over emphasized because of the following reasons:

- Humour improves our health and helps us to be resistant to diseases. It lets us feel more positive about life. It improves our feeling of self-worth and improves our relationship with people.
- Humour has to do with intelligence and improves children's learning ability. Children need to think why a joke is funny and it teaches them to think.
- Humour builds the bond between people and between children and parents. When people share pleasant experiences, they feel closer to each other.
- Humour stimulates children to remember better. If they link facts to a joke, they will remember the joke much longer (Tigris and Euphrates)\*.
- Humour builds resilience. During difficult times it gives children the energy not to give up. Many people who have been in wars and concentration camps told afterwards that humour helped them to cope and not to give up.
- Humour and fun help children to get rid of stress and avoid conflict.

- When we get home after work and the children are running around and everything is untidy, rather than shouting or getting angry, we should play with our children for a while before we ask them to clean up.
- If our homes are full of fun and humour, our children will want to stay home.

### Tips for teaching our children a sense of humour

- Be a good role model of humour. Try to remember good jokes and share it with the family.
- Learn to have a good laugh.
- Jokes need to be on our children's level of understanding. Complicated jokes make them feel confused.
- Jokes must never be humiliating or at the expense of anybody, least of all our children. We must ask ourselves whether our jokes are a hidden way of teasing or bullying our children. Our body language and the message that it conveys is important. We must stop immediately if a joke upsets a child.
- We need to listen to our children's jokes even if they are boring or even when we are in a hurry.
- When things really go wrong, we must always try to see the funny side, instead of getting upset or angry.
- We may really sometimes make a joke at our own expense. It won't be any skin off our noses and it will make our children feel closer to us.

\*The example of the Tigris and Euphrates is an Afrikaans example that was explained to the parents – if a child has to remember these two rivers and he can remember 'tier' and 'vraat', it will be easier. The parents were then asked to try and create their own humoristic examples for when their children have to remember something.

Jokes – a collection of child friendly jokes downloaded free of charge from the Internet is handed out.

### Part 2

**Song:** Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

This song teaches nothing but fun.

A horse and a flea and three blind mice  
 Stepped off the curb and slipped on ice  
 The horse he slipped and fell on the flea  
 "Whoops," said the flea, "There's a horse c



Chorus: Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?  
 Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?  
 Giggly and foolish the whole day through  
 Boom, boom, ain't it great to be crazy?

Way down South where bananas grow  
 A flea stepped on an elephant's toe ...

**Activity 1:**

Buttons: Each parent-child-dyad was given a plastic cup with an assortment of buttons (see annexure I). The parents were instructed to guide their children to sort the buttons according to size and colour, to count it, pack it into shapes and different positions. This exercise develops children's fine motor coordination, visual discrimination, spatial orientation and early numeracy skills.

**Activity 2: Face paint or finger paint**

In accordance with the topic, this activity provided fun and much laughing. Face paint and many designs of face painting were provided and parents and their children could decide which design to copy. Mirrors were provided for the learners to see the end result. As an alternative for parents who were hesitant to apply the face paint to their children's facial skin, finger paint was prepared and parents and learners did finger painting on newspaper outside on the terrace.



*(Photograph 7: Parents paint their Grade R children's faces with great concentration.)*



(Photograph 8: Parents and Grade R children doing finger painting.)

## SESSION 11

### Component 3: Resilience

#### 5.6.11 Topic 11: Teach your child to think positively

##### Resources

Music:

Notes: Teaching children to think positively

Other notes:

- Thinking (Walter Wintle, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thinking\\_\(poem\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thinking_(poem)))
- 10 things to ask yourself to stay positive when facing difficulty (<http://www.lifehack.org/articles/communication/10-questions-ask-yourself-stay-positive-when-facing-difficulties.html>)
- Telling your own stories and playing the word dice game <http://wordworks.org.za/listening-and-talking-to-build-language-2/> (see annexure I)
- Story: Froggy and Buggie (by Corlie Putter)

- Mindfulness colouring pages (Shambala website – now unavailable)

Bean bags

Tea, coffee, cookies, sugar, cooldrink, cups, urn

## Part 1

### Topic: Teach your children to think positively

#### TEACH YOUR CHILD TO THINK POSITIVELY

Life is sometimes hard and then people tend to see only the bad side of life. There are people who are negative and expect bad things to happen even when things are going well. Hence the expression the glass is half full or half empty.

Anybody can learn to be a positive person who expects good things to happen and who can think and live positively. Our children come into this world without negative thoughts and they learn from the people around them, including us, to be positive or negative. What we say and think carries a lot of power and it has a direct influence on our health, our relationships, our functioning and our whole life. Our behaviour, reactions and responses are our teaching tools and these tools speak louder than words.

Here are a few suggestions on how we can teach our children to think and speak positively:

- We can teach our children that they can exercise control over their thoughts and words.
- We should remind them that, to feel positive or negative about something that happens to them, is a choice that they can make.
- We must smile often. We can laugh at ourselves and allow others to laugh with us. We can tell our children that, just to laugh or smile, causes our brain to secrete chemicals into our bodies that make us feel good.
- We can create a positive atmosphere in our homes by speaking positively to our children, doing fun things together, laughing and making jokes.
- We need to give our children lots of hugs, love, compliments and 'high fives!' We can speak gently and positively to them about their strong points.
- We must talk positively about all people, including family members.
- We need to support our children to find pleasant hobbies in which they excel and that will give them self-confidence. We must encourage them to develop their talents.

- When our children are older, we can encourage them to keep a diary of good and bad things that happen in their lives. When something really bad happens, we must not deny that it happened, but acknowledge that it is really hard, but then point out how the child might benefit or learn from it so that it will not happen again.
- We can practise gratefulness therapy with our children – talk about all the good things that we can still be grateful for in spite of what happens. Maybe we can use one evening a week to sit around the supper table and talk about everything that we have that we can be grateful for.

Nobody's life is without problems, but it depends on us what we make of it!

## Part 2

Song: Old MacDonald had a farm. This song develops vocabulary, the skill to group something (farm animals) together and to learn sounds.



Old MacDonald had a farm, heyi, heyi, ho  
 And on this farm he had some ducks, heyi, heyi, ho  
 With a quack! quack! here and a quack! quack! there  
 Here a quack! there a quack, everywhere a quack! quack!  
 Old MacDonald had a farm, heyi, heyi, ho.

Old MacDonald had a farm, heyi, heyi, ho  
 And on this farm he had some cows, heyi, heyi, ho ...

**Activity 1:** Beanbags: Each parent/child received a beanbag. Parents and children had to throw it to each other – both hands, alternative hands, throw in circle, pack in shapes on carpet, walk over, pass on in a circle (switching bag from left to right hand). This exercise promotes eye-hand coordination and balance.

**Activity 2:** Play the dice game with magazine or own story. The parents were issued with a hand-out on the power of spending a few minutes talking to their children every day. They had to cut out, fold and paste a colourful paper dice with one word on each of the sides: what, where, who, when, why and how. Together with their children they could throw the dice, and, depending on what word was on top, tell a story or ask each other questions. They could also page through magazines, pick a picture and ask these questions with regards to the picture. The aim of this activity is to stimulate conversation between parent and child and to facilitate talking especially when parents are not in the habit of conversing with their children and do not know how to start a conversation.

**Activity 3:** Mindfulness colouring pages (see annexure I). The affirmative statements on the four colouring pages are:

- I make a difference in the world. I am important and my thoughts matter.
- My inner treasure chest is full of strength, courage and love.
- I am like a beautiful dragonfly. I am peaceful, special and unique.
- Breathe deeply and relax. I take time to enjoy each moment that my life has to offer (see annexure I).

Parents were encouraged to put the colouring pages against the wall at home and to repeat the affirmative statements to their children to teach them the power of affirmative statements.

## SESSION 12

### Component 3: Resilience

#### 5.6.12 Topic 12: Parent wellness

##### Resources

Topic: Parent Well-being and Self-talk

Elastic bands

Laptop and amplifiers

Materials to complete drawing of self/mirrors

Fine motor writing and shapes exercises

Tea, coffee, milk, cookies, cooldrink, cups, urn

##### Part 1

Discuss notes with parents

### PARENT WELL-BEING

It is a challenge to raise children in today's society and often parents are made to feel that they are not good enough. Parents who feel healthy and good about themselves are in a better position to be good parents than parents who don't. Parents should practice self-care and a healthy lifestyle, not only because they are important to their children, but because they are human beings in their own right.

##### The following can be included in self-care:

Healthy eating – eat from all the main nutritional groups

- Proteins: meat, fish, cheese, eggs, milk
- Carbohydrates: whole grain bread, potatoes, pasta
- Vitamins: fresh fruit, vegetables and salad
- Fats: butter, animal fat, cream (small quantities)
- Water is very important.

Get enough sleep – if you still get up during the night for a baby, take a nap during the day.

Exercise and fresh air.

A support network – family or friends to talk to and receive emotional support from.

ME-time and relaxation – doing something that you really enjoy.

- Pamper yourself
- Progressive relaxation exercises to de-stress
- Do something creative

REMEMBER: You are important and you have rights!

### SELF-TALK

Self-talk is an aspect of self-image that maintains a good or a poor self-image. All of us talk to ourselves every day, although we are not aware of it. The psychologist, Edmund J Bourne, describes how self-talk works:

- It is so automatic and subtle that we do not realize what effect it has on our feelings and well-being.
- It mostly appears in telegram style as just one word or picture in our mind (e.g. 'Oh no!'), but those words create a whole range of thoughts, feelings, memories and associations in us.
- Anxious self-talk is typical and irrational (unreasonable/unrealistic) but it sounds like the truth.
- Negative self-talk increases avoidance – avoiding a situation that seems difficult.
- It can cause or increase anxiety attacks.

Negative self-talk is a nasty habit. It originates from the negative messages that we receive from other people such as our parents and educators or through bad experiences that we have had. We believe the negative messages and we start to tell these things to ourselves.

**Negative self-talk can change.** The first step is to become aware of the negative things that you tell yourself. Put an elastic band around your arm and shoot yourself with it every time that you catch yourself that you are communicating bad things to yourself.

Write down a few of the negative self-talk thoughts that you discover.....

Step two is to replace a negative statement with a positive one.

Write down the new positive statements that you are going to repeat to yourself instead of the old negative ones: .....

Repeat these positive things to yourself 5 – 10 times every day until you believe it.

### Activity 1

The researcher showed the parents two videos to motivate them to refrain from putting themselves down and to look for potential in themselves.

Paul Pots First Edition at Britain's got talent, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VnCX31HIFAE>

Susan Boyle First Audition - Britain's Got Talent – 'I Dreamed a Dream'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aRiJNS8Oz6E>

The researcher explained to the parents that both Paul Pots and Susan Boyle had to scrape together courage to participate in the competition and, although the judges and the spectators were very sceptical, they received a standing ovation in the end. The researcher encouraged the parents to refrain from underestimating themselves, to discover their own dream, and to have the courage to pursue it.

### 5.6.13 Conclusion of the programme

The certificate ceremony was the last session of the programme. All the schools provided refreshments for everyone. The principals of the schools addressed the parents and thanked them for taking the time to attend the programme. All the principals also expressed their gratitude to the researcher for the trouble that she had taken to present the programme and they were unanimous in their opinion that the programme was of great value to the Grade R learners.

All the parents and learners who had attended eight sessions or more received an attendance certificate (see annexure J). Together with the certificate the parents received a small motivational pack (see below) and the learners received a pack of sweets. The volunteers and school staff who had assisted, also received a service certificate and a small gift.



(Photograph 9: Attendance certificates for Grade R learners and their parents.)

At School R the parents had collected money and had bought the researcher a luxury gift pack of toiletries. Each of the parents had also written a message of thanks on a large envelope, which the researcher appreciated.

Motivational pack:

The following card was given to each parent. For each 'reminder' there was an item in the cellophane packet:

**A KIT TO CHEER YOU UP**

1. An eraser to make all those little mistakes go away.
2. A five-cent coin so you will never be completely broke.
3. A tissue to remind you to wipe the tears of others and your own.
4. A golden thread to remind you that friendship is a golden thread that binds us together.
5. A toothpick to remind you to pick out the good qualities in others and in yourself.
6. A paper clip to remind you that, when things look like they are going to fall apart, God will keep them together for you if you allow Him.
7. An elastic band to remind you to stretch out your arms to give someone a hug. Also for those times when you want to receive one.
8. A button to remind you to button your lips when you want to say harmful things to others or about others. Use words that will build people up, not break them down.
9. A sweet to remind you that everyone needs a treat sometimes and also to remind you that someone cares.



(Photograph 10: A kit to cheer you up)

## 5.7 CONCLUSION

The parenting programme was implemented in three schools and consisted of 12 sessions. The components that formed the framework for the sessions were identified in the previous chapter and twelve topics supporting the components were identified. The programme was developed around the twelve topics.

Each session consisted of a discussion with the parents while the Grade R learners kept themselves busy colouring in the picture that accompanied the story. Then there were a variety of activities, starting with music and dance/movement that the parents and learners did together. This arrangement worked out well and the participants seemed to enjoy the activities. The researcher prepared an information pack for each parent-child group and handed it out at the start of the session.

In the next chapter the implementation of the parenting skills programme will be evaluated by analysing the data collected through the interview with the parents.

## CHAPTER 6

### EVALUATING THE EFFECT OF THE PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMME ON THE SCHOOL READINESS OF GRADE R LEARNERS

#### Phase 5: Evaluation and advanced development (Step 7)



#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter described the implementation of the prototype. This chapter deals with the evaluation of the prototype to gauge whether it needed to be developed further. This step will meet the second half of the fourth objective as described in chapter 1: To present the parenting skills programme in two schools in resource poor communities and assess the effect of the programme on Grade R learners by using qualitative data.

#### 6.2 METHODOLOGY

The proposed intervention research was planned to be a qualitative study. The research was done in the following way:

### **6.2.1 Sampling for semi-structured interviews**

After the prototype had been implemented in three schools namely School P, School N and School R, semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine parents. Purposive sampling was done by contacting parents who had attended 10 or more of the 12 sessions of the parenting programme. Most of these parents had attended all the sessions. A tenth interview failed because a grandmother who had attended the programme, could not attend the interview and she sent her adult daughter who is the biological mother of the Grade R learner, to attend. However, this person could not provide usable data. Subsequent to the further development and implementation of the prototype, the researcher contacted another four parents for interviews. Since fundamental changes to the prototype were not deemed necessary, and since the data provided by the two groups of parents were mostly similar, the results of all the interviews are discussed together in this chapter.

Of the thirteen interviews with parents, three were conducted with biological fathers, nine with biological mothers, and one with a grandmother. The fathers were underrepresented in the parenting programme and all the fathers who had attended the programme were included in the interviews. The venues where the interviews were conducted were venues that were convenient for the parents and they included the target schools and the parents' homes. The homes varied from small but neat and adequately furnished, to a minute, dilapidated caravan in someone's backyard which one mother and her Grade R son shared with three other adults. This mother showed little emotion and spoke almost inaudibly during the interview, but afterwards when she accompanied the researcher to the researcher's vehicle, she remarked that she had known the researcher would not disappoint her (by not contacting her for an interview), showing a glimmer of positive emotion. Some of the interviews were challenged by environmental noise that the researcher could not control, such as the playing and shouting of learners during break-time.

### **6.2.2 Data collection**

The quality of the data gathered during the semi-structured interviews with the parents varied. A few parents could provide rich, detailed information. However, some of the parents could not provide in-depth information. Although all the parents expressed great appreciation for the programme, some parents could not remember specific topics and the researcher had the impression that abstract concepts such as self-control and social development were not part of their conscious familiar world. However, when the researcher questioned them about specific aspects or concrete activities, they could remember more detail. The response of Parent 13 to the question what she liked most about the programme, is typical of the concrete responses of some parents: *'That one about children needing to be in bed by eight o' clock. She must be in bed by eight o' clock. And about the small fingers, movement of the small muscles... and the little games that we played'*. When P12 was asked what made her return after the first session, she said that

she liked the traffic signs and the robot best (the robot and run/freeze activity in the self-control session) (*'...of stop and the road signs ...actually I could learn something to say that the road signs were more important to me and that I can also teach my child, when to walk and when to stop.'*). At the beginning of the interview with Parent 3, the latter started to tell her whole life story to the researcher. This lasted about one hour before the questions on the schedule could be asked, but the researcher did not interrupt her, because the researcher sensed that she needed to share her story. The result was that not all the questions could be asked. It needs to be kept in mind that these parents are not academic people and that they were not requested to prepare for the interviews by reviewing their notes, as this would have created an artificial situation, preventing the acquisition of valid results. The researcher sometimes had to make sense from answers that seemed confusing. The response of P10 to the question whether the activities of the programme were easy enough to understand, was the following: *'Yes, but sometimes I'll follow it, sometimes I forget about it. I'm not like go on with it and, and like normal days again and so.'* The programme also presented the parents with a high volume of information, which might have been too much to digest in such a short space of time.

### **6.2.3 Ethical principles**

The researcher strove to adhere to the ethical principles of her profession and of research. No coercion was used to recruit participants and the participants were assured that participation was voluntary. As suggested by Creswell (2013:58,174), the researcher was welcoming and she first established trust by explaining the aim of the interview and asking a few general questions before continuing with the semi-structured interview. The participants were treated with respect and consideration of their needs at all times. The interviews were conducted at a time and at venues that suited the participants – at their homes or at the respective schools, and the researcher arranged for privacy at the schools. The confidential nature of the interviews was explained and anonymity was ensured by not recording any identifying details (Creswell, 2013:174; Mukherji & Dryden, 2015:123). When one participant told her life story, the researcher listened for one hour without interrupting her, out of respect for her need to share her story. The researcher requested the transcriber not to transcribe that part of the interview, because it contained irrelevant personal details. The audio recordings contained only the first name of the interviewees and not any other identifying details. Transcriptions of the interviews will be treated in accordance with the provisions of the Human Research Ethics Committee of NWU (HREC).

### **6.2.4 Profile of the parents (semi-structured interviews) – Participant group 6**

The profiles of the 13 parents who were interviewed are as follows:

Participant number	Age	Relationship to Grade R learner	Level of education	Occupation	Marital status	Number of occupants in the house

P1	62	Biological father	Grade 9	Shuttle service (Taxi driver)	Living together	3
	Extreme physical and emotional abuse of the father and Grade R learner, by father's partner, who is the Grade R's biological mother.					
P2	27	Biological mother	Grade 12, busy with ECD training	Fulltime mother	Married, husband not the biological father of the Grade R learner	3
	Peace in the home, but biological father of the Grade R learner causes much tension – does not pay maintenance, does not visit when he promises, but causes trouble.					
P3	37	Biological mother	Grade 11	Waitress		6
	Rejection of mother and Grade R learner by the grandmother and step-grandfather with whom they live					
P4	31	Biological mother	Grade 12, studied 1 year secretarial course	Fulltime mother	Married	5
	Serious friction between own son of 11 and husband's son of 21 from previous relationship.					
P5	35	Biological father	Grade 12	Retrenched	Married	4
	Two-parent family, no problems					
P6	48	Biological mother	Grade 12 and nursing	Nursing assistant	Single	2
	Rejection of learner by biological father.					
P7	32	Biological mother	Grade 9	Unemployed	Single, does not know where the father of children is	3
	Mother was abused as a child by her mother's drinking friends. She was raped at 13. Then she abused drugs until she discovered that she was pregnant with her first child. Now she lives with her children in a bungalow that is dilapidated and leaks when it rains. Also serious financial problems.					
P8	67	Grandmother	Grade 10	Unemployed	Married	9
	This grandmother takes care of the Grade R grandchild, as well as of two great-grandchildren of her adult granddaughter who is addicted to substances.					
P9	48	Biological mother	Grade 12	Nursing assistant	Divorced	5
	Single parent, although the biological father is involved in the Grade R learner's life.					
P10	37	Biological mother	Grade 7	Home carer	Separated	8
	Grandmother who is head of household abuses alcohol and fights regularly with rest of family.					
P11	36	Biological father	Grade 12 and tertiary qualification	Quantity surveyor	Married	4
	No problems, normal family					
P12	24	Biological mother	Grade 9	Factory worker	Unmarried	5
	The mother and Grade R lives in a tiny caravan in someone's backyard that they share with the grandparents and mother's sister. The landlady's grandson abuses TIK and causes problems.					
P13		Biological mother	Grade 5	Unemployed, previously a cleaner	Married	4

### **6.3 EVALUATION OF THE PROGRAMME**

The qualitative data obtained through the interviews were analysed and the following results were obtained:

#### **6.3.1 Logistics**

The parents all heard about the parenting programme through the school, either by attending the parent evening or by letter from the principal.

#### **6.3.2 Venue**

The schools offered an ideal venue for the parenting programme, because they were the Grade R schools that were within reach. Some parents had to make use of public transport and this may have been one of the causes for late coming. One mother and her child repeatedly came late. Then she informed the researcher that they had to take three taxis to get to the venue, because they live far away. The researcher once gave this lady R50 for taxi money, but unfortunately they stopped attending.

At two of the schools the programme was presented in the school hall. At School P one session was presented in a Grade R classroom, because the hall was otherwise occupied. This was not conducive to the programme, because the toys and apparatus in the classroom distracted the learners' attention, and lead to considerable stress for the mothers who had to reprimand their children repeatedly to stay away from the educator's stuff. The ideal venue is one in which there are no toys or apparatus to distract attention.

#### **6.3.3 Parents responses to question of what had attracted them to attend the programme**

The parents decided to attend the programme for various reasons, such as a desire to improve their parenting skills (P2, P5, P9, P10), to strengthen their attachment with their child (P6, P11), to prevent the child from going through what the mother had gone through (P7) or because the father was in an abusive relationship and wanted to help his child (P1). Two parents mentioned that the name of the programme 'My child is a winner' attracted them, because they want their children to be winners (P3, P4). One participant, a grandmother, attended the sessions on behalf of her daughter who could not attend, due to work responsibilities (P8). Participant P3 gave the following explanation: *'I couldn't understand him who he is (her Grade R son). I didn't understand him. So*

*when they said, 'My Child is a Winner', you must learn more about your child, so I'm like, 'wow, this is for me.'*

#### **6.3.4 Parents' responses to question what had made them return after the first session**

Responses to this question varied from, the programme material that was interesting/educational (P1, P9, P13), that it made sense (P2), or that it can be applied in everyday life (P6). *'It was educational, it was informative and I felt, for me it meant a lot'* (P8). P10 responded with: *'I was excited because I wanted this for him [her Grade R son]. Because I'm having trouble with him sometimes ... And so I thought I want to go on with this, because that is my ... the thing I wanted to do, something that can happen and then I know I can teach these children to do things right, like we did there in the classes.'* P5 contributed by indicating the practical applicability of the programme by saying: *'It's something that anybody can learn. From grandparents to newcomers, to parents whose got kids that's 21. I think they can even ... even parents that's ... or great-grandparents can even attend, because with the things that we've learnt they can implement on their grandkids again ... I mean, yes, it's something that I think I'd probably carry with me until they're both grown, until I'm old and I have their grandkids then I'll probably still be doing it.'* P7 is a mother who suffers from back problems and is in constant pain. Nevertheless, she attended all the sessions and responded as follows: *'Just seeing my daughter happy, interacting, helping my daughter interact and do things we never do at home. Because she never gets that time with me, because I'm always in pain. And the times when we were in the class was the only times when we really interacted.'*

P4 gave an explanation that was more directed towards herself: *'Ja, but the first day you can sort of feel that welcome, that you're welcome, you don't feel out, you don't feel like minus someone else or so. You just feel free. You actually forget about the problems at home or whatever happens. You're just a different person when you're there, from my side.'* This response indicates that the researcher possibly achieved the goal of making the parents feel welcome and at home. Other responses confirm this conclusion. P6 commented accordingly on the researcher's attitude towards the parents: *'... you were like one of us. None of us knew you when you came in, but you did become like one of us. You would walk around, come to us at the tables and talk to us. Everybody spoke about that. They actually liked that.'*

#### **6.3.5 Various other questions**

##### **6.3.5.1 Were there any sessions that were boring?**

The parents were united in saying that no session was boring. They enjoyed all the sessions and the researcher should not omit any session. The parents' comments were all in line with P5, who said: *'I don't think you should take anything away. All of it was something that people deal with every day ...'* and P6 who stated: *'None of the parents there was bored with any of the sessions. I*

*don't think so because after a while you could hear, when we talk to one another, we all enjoyed it.'* Later on P7 commented: *'Don't change a thing. Because there are parents who need to know what we know and also need to learn.'*

#### 6.3.5.2 *Did you understand the notes and the instructions?*

The parents agreed that they did not have problems understanding the notes or instructions. P3 said: *'No, because you wanted us to understand and then you said to us we must ask where we don't understand. That part, if I don't understand I must ask. So to me you were open.'* P4 expressed this opinion: *'Like I say, all the notes, plain and simple, you spoke in simple language, even with the fathers that were there. They normally they're always on their own, but they joined in.'* P12 said that, when she did not understand the notes, she asked her mother at home to explain it to her.

#### 6.3.5.3 *Were the activities practical enough for you to understand and apply?*

According to the parents all the activities were easily understood and easy to replicate at home. P11 said: *'You used very simple things, such as buttons and those that one could play with, stuff that one has at home. I mean, it is not as if one has to especially go out and buy something for the children to play with.'*

#### 6.3.5.4: *How has the programme influenced your child's school progress?*

All the parents alleged that their Grade R children had improved significantly in their school work. Responses varied from a glowing report such as: *'He had improved tremendously in his school work. He now follows instructions and says he listens to his teacher'* (P1) and *'The teacher said she's very impressed. The pace that she's working at has improved a lot.'* (P4) to *'Hmmm, it has improved a lot. Yes, I feel she is more school ready. I was very worried, because I thought gee, she wasn't in a crèche, but she has adapted well'* (P9). Two parents commented that their children still need to improve in certain aspects of school readiness: *'Yes. He's improved a lot. There are just certain times that the teacher tells him that he is too hasty, which I do understand. He tries to finish his work off quickly.'* (P5). Another parent commented: *The last time when I went, now in September, she said to me that his maths is hundred percent. She said to me adult relationships hundred percent. She hasn't got a problem with him with that. The only thing is his reading... So I helped him with that reading'* (P6).

The researcher concedes that most Grade R learners improve in their school work simply by being in Grade R and by being exposed to the class structure, activities and the curriculum. Another fact is that this improvement is parent reported and may be biased in favour of the Grade R learners. However, all the parents feel that the programme contributed to the learners' school work, and therefore it is probable that the programme contributed to this improvement.

### **6.3.6 Responses with regards to the 12 sessions were the following:**

#### *6.3.6.1 The five love languages*

**Component 1: Parent-child relationship**  
**Session 1: The five love languages**

The importance of a warm, supportive relationship with a parental figure in early childhood development and school readiness, is clearly described in literature and was discussed in Chapters 1 and 4. 'The five love languages' was the topic of the first session of the programme. The session was aimed at strengthening the parent-child relationship and teaching parents how to show their love for their children in practical ways. The session was based on the 'The five love languages for children' by Chapman and Campbell (2015:n.p.). Activities for this session, as described in Chapter 5, were focused on good parental touch with a hand massage, back rub, eating pretzels from both sides and a 'treasure hunt'.

All the parents remembered this session and could tell the researcher which of the love languages they still applied. Several parents mentioned that they applied touch (P6, P9, P10, P11, P13). Two parents (P1, P13) spoke about communication and that they had learnt to express things differently, and others mentioned spending quality time together (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P7, P11, P13). For three parents the 'love languages' message had a profound impact on their relationships. P3 mentioned that applying the touch exercises, had established a bond between her and her son for the first time. P11 spoke in the same vein and said that he had discovered the importance of spending time with his children to build a trusting relationship with them. P4 had applied the love languages not only to her child, but also to her marriage, which had led to spending more time with her husband and having fewer arguments than before. This improvement will undoubtedly have positive consequences for the Grade R learner in that family. According to Santrock (2014:393) the quality of parenting improves when the marital relationships is enhanced, benefiting the children. P11 had discovered for the first time how important his involvement with his children was, and this had brought about a much closer bond between them than before. With regards to the probable impact of this topic on school readiness, a discussion of the improvement in parent-child relationships will follow later in this chapter. It seems as if the concept of love languages and the simple, very basic activities made a difference in the parent-child relationship of the participating parents and Grade R learners. Considering the impact of a warm, nurturing relationship on school readiness, described in the literature as discussed in Chapter 2, this session should be included in all parenting programmes that are aimed at enhancing the school readiness of Grade R learners.

### 6.3.6.2 How to build my child's self-esteem

#### **Component 2: Social and emotional development Session 2: How to build my child's self-esteem**

The importance of positive self-esteem in the development of school readiness was discussed in Chapters 2 and 4. According to Berk (2006:458) in De Witt (2016:126) self-esteem plays a critical role in academic achievement and mental health. This session was aimed at teaching parents how to build their children's self-esteem in practical ways. The Grade R's then made a 'brag bag' while the parents wrote them a loving message to put into the 'brag bag'.

Parents were asked two questions to determine whether their children had benefited with regards to self-esteem. The first was what they remembered about the session: 'How to build my child's self-esteem'. The second was whether their Grade R children had grown in self-confidence. It seemed as if the parents understood better what self-confidence entailed than what self-esteem did. With regards to parental behaviours to build self-esteem, P1 responded that he speaks in positive terms, so that his son can see himself in a positive way. P2 mentioned that it was good to hear what one could actually do to lift one's child's self-esteem. In this regard P5 remarked: *'... telling them that they're doing well and things like that. Yes. I do that every morning with them.'* Participant P6 had the following to say: *'I don't think I would have known how to apply it to my child if I didn't have that info. I had to learn that it was important to say to your child you are special, you are a good boy, even if other people say you're not good. You are good to mommy ... And it helped a lot... I think it was just the first two weeks of that course, like I say the self-esteem notes ... for a child, I mean, I also realised the sooner you start the better. The easier it gets for them also, to say to this child that you are special and good. I sometimes hear how he speaks to the other kids and say, but my mommy says I'm good, I'm not coming out again. You stay where you are. I'm going to my mommy, my mommy says I'm good'.* Parent P7 expressed herself from a low socio-economic point of view: *'Self-image is so important, before you step out of your house ... I say, because you have to look decent no matter what. I may be poor, but at least you're not gonna walk out of this house (without) looking decent. So self-image first and the rest afterwards.'*

Three parents indicated that what was taught about self-esteem, was also relevant to the parents themselves. P3 mentioned that she had not known who she was or that she had a right to stand up for herself. P7 said that she was working on her own self-esteem. P6 suggested that the researcher spend more time on self-esteem, because she could see that several parents battled with that. She added that self-esteem makes a parent emotionally more stable and that parental self-esteem is carried over to the child.

All the parents' responses indicate that the Grade R's had gained positive self-esteem and self-confidence after the programme. Two parents indicated that their children had been too shy to dance to music in front of others, but since the programme, they were joining in (P1, P5). Another parent (P2) said that her son's therapist at T (hospital), reported that the son was talking more and his educator at school had reported that he was also dancing with the other children now, whereas before he had been too shy. The educator of P11's Grade R son had reported that the boy's self-confidence in class had improved markedly. Whereas he had sat in a corner previously, he now put up his hand, got out of his seat and came to the front to ask the educator for something. According to P10 his son feels good about himself: '*... and he likes to, at school, the teacher says he is very hardworking and if he's done with his things, then he will help the others at school. He's very good ...*' Although P4 first alleged that her daughter had never had a problem with self-confidence, she also added: '*At the beginning she was very shy and quiet. She would just sit and ... but it's now for quite a while ... she's just herself. She has come out of her shell. She is just a different person.*' P12 confirmed that her son felt good about himself. She added that he would constantly say something like: '*Hi Mommy, I look smart, don't I? Then I say: 'Yes, very smart.'*' P13 said that her daughter was now more focused on her school work and she said that she wanted to become a doctor, whereas previously she had never talked about such things.

Children of the Grade R age group tend to have an inflated self-esteem, but not totally unrealistic. Self-esteem is closely associated with a secure attachment with parents, and children with a secure attachment with both parents have the most positive self-esteem. Shaffer and Kipp (2010:487-488) cite Vershueren, Marcoen and Schoefs (1996) who found that an early fairly established sense of self-esteem corresponded with social skills as reported by educators. The researcher acknowledges that the self-esteem and self-confidence of the Grade R participants' were expected to improve due to their participation in the Grade R curriculum, and by being in the social environment of Grade R. However, it also seems likely that the parenting programme contributed to this growth, judging from the parents' new-found awareness of the importance of self-esteem and of the way that their actions encourage the growth of positive self-esteem in their children.

#### 6.3.6.3 *Positive discipline*

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**  
**Session 3: Positive discipline**

Discipline plays an important role in teaching children behaviour regulation as discussed in Chapter 4. The researcher explained to the parents that, although corporal punishment by parents

had not been declared illegal in South African legislation, it was desirable to raise children without violence in the light of the violent society that South Africans live in. According to the responses that the parents gave to the question of how they were applying the principles of positive discipline, it is evident that they are taking this advice to heart:

Talking strictly to their children, works for some parents (P1, P6, P8, P10, P11, P12). Sometimes when talking does not work, P8 brings out the wooden spoon and that brings about instant obedience, while P11 said that he occasionally gives his son one smack with his hand on the boy's backside, when he refuses to listen.

Using consequences works for several parents (P5, P6, P10, P11, P12, P13). Three parents mentioned using time-out (P5, P1, P12), while others use a reward system. P4 uses a behaviour chart with small rewards at the end of the week, such as an ice-cream or R5. This parent's Grade R child and his sibling love to check on the chart how many 'goodness' and 'naughtiness' marks they have accumulated for the week. P5 and P10 call their children inside to talk to them if they play outside and start fighting. P6 devised quite a novel way to use consequences with her son. He used to slam his bedroom door when he was angry. Then this mother put an axe down in the house and said that she was going to chop down his door if he slammed it again. He loves the sense of privacy that his bedroom gives him, so the door slamming promptly stopped. P3 also uses a reward system and her way of exercising positive discipline has now flowed over to the rest of the household, to the benefit of both the Grade R learner and his sister. P3 remarked: *'...because there is this thing that I learned from you, which you said, we must award them when they do something good'*. This mother described the following exchange between her daughter (sibling to the Grade R) and the grandmother and step-grandfather who had previously been quite abusive towards the mother and her children: *'But when they (the grandparents) say, 'thank you, you are a star'. she's like, 'oh, I'm a star, you guys, me, I'm a star.' 'Yes, you are a genius; give me five and a kiss.' They love that. I learned something about your teaching.'* P13 uses rewards and praise: *When she has done something wrong, I take away her childrens' programmes ('poppentjies') that she adores ... then when she has done something good for me, I tell her, 'come here. I am proud of you', then I put a star on her forehead'. ('As sy verkeerd gedoen het, dan neem ek haar poppentjies weg wat sy oor gek is.... dan as sy iets vir my goed gedoen het, dan sê ek vir haar, 'come here, I'm proud of you', dan sit ek 'n sterretjie voor haar kop').*

The two parents whose responses differed from the other parents' were P2 and P7. P2 alleged that she never has to give her son a hiding because he is always well behaved. The only parent who expressed doubt about discipline was P7. Viewed from a bioecological perspective and the influence that the chronosystem exercises, this mother's confusion is understandable. She herself was abused as a child and she was disciplined with a sjambok. Now she is hesitant to be firm with

her children and does not follow through with consequences, with the result that her children are not always obedient. Her Grade R daughter is also not satisfied with hugs and praise as rewards, but insists on monetary rewards. During the programme the researcher cautioned parents against rewarding with money, to prevent children from complying for the wrong reasons.

The way that discipline is exercised is a distinguishing feature of the different parenting styles described by Baumrind (1967, 1997) as cited by Mitchell and Ziegler (2013:232-234) and Martorell, *et al.* (2014:324). It seems likely that the majority of parents who were interviewed understand the concept of positive discipline and there are indications that they successfully apply the principles of inductive discipline, rewards and consequences. Three parents divulged that they were raised by their parents through harsh parenting, including shouting and swearing (P10) and severe beatings (P7, P11). This is not uncommon in a community where parents have to contend with socio-economic adversity (Mesman, *et al.*, 2012:245; Pinderhughes, *et al.*, 2000:n.p.). Harsh discipline is associated with increased acting-out behaviour and poor outcomes for school readiness (Chang, *et al.*, 2011:790; Choe, *et al.*, 2013:2036). Judging from the data provided by the parents, it seems likely that the presentation of the topic on positive discipline was successful in making parents aware of other ways to discipline their children, and empowering the parents to apply these principles, with potentially good outcomes for their children's general development and school readiness.

#### 6.3.6.4 *Helping my child to deal with feelings*

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**  
**Session 4: Helping my child to deal with feelings**

Emotion regulation is closely linked to all the other aspects of school readiness (Eisenberg, *et al.*, 2005:109; Havighurst, *et al.*, 2013:248). Children's emotional development and what parents can do to teach them to deal with feelings were discussed in the literature study in Chapters 2 and 4. The activity for this session included making a faces chart that parents and Grade R's could use to talk about feelings. The parents were encouraged to talk to their children about feelings, provide them with a feelings vocabulary and be good role models of emotional control. Data provided during the parent interviews to the question how the parents feel about this session were the following:

One parent (P1) did not really provide an answer, but said feelings is a difficult issue because of the abusive behaviour of his partner. He said that when she becomes abusive, the Grade R learner withdraws and lies in the corner. This information was regarded in a serious light by the

researcher, who suggested that the father make use of available means to stop the alleged abuse by his partner. The researcher also referred this to the local welfare organisation.

Parents who were positive about the feelings session and shared how their children had learnt to express their feelings were P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P7, P10 and P13. Some parents (P4, P7, P10) mentioned that their children could tell them when their feelings had been hurt by the parent. (*'And if my voice was a little bit too loud for her, then she will tell me, 'but mommy, you hurt me so much, my feelings, you hurt my feelings and my heart, it's so much pain mommy' P7*). During the discussion of the topic the researcher had advised the parents that they also needed to share with their Grade R children when their own feelings are hurt, so that the Grade R's can learn that others also have feelings, preventing them from growing up and thinking that only their own feelings matter. P4 said that her child could observe when she was feeling sad and would then enquire about what had made her sad. P10 and P13 mentioned that they could tell their children when they had made them sad by misbehaving and they could then discuss it. This type of exchange provides convenient teaching moments to convey moral values to children and make them aware of the impact that their behaviour has on other people.

P5 stated that a friend of his had died recently and that his children had been able to express their sadness and ask why this had happened. He expressed a greater awareness of feelings in himself when he remarked: *'It's all the sessions that we had dealing with feelings and things like that. I feel hurt, I feel sad, I've lost something that I care about.'* P6 felt that the feelings teaching had been beneficial to herself, because she had never learnt as a child to express her own feelings. (*'In fact, the chart applies more to me I think, because as a child I had difficulty expressing myself, saying how I really feel. I would rather sit and cry at home instead of telling somebody and talking to the next person.'* Her son has now learnt to express his feelings, which leads to meaningful interaction between mother and child. *'He's opposite to me. 'I'm angry with you mommy, I'm angry with you.'* Then in another situation: *I'll say, 'It's fine if you're angry, but you must tell me why you're angry. Did I do something?'* Then the boy shares with her something that happened at crèche that made him angry. Parent 11 had not attended the feelings session because his wife had attended, but he mentioned several times during the interview that the programme had contributed to him learning to manage and control his own quick temper and to be more patient with his children. P8 did not give a response that had bearing on the Grade R, but she did indicate that she is now more aware of emotions in the family circle.

Some parents mentioned that their Grade R children still have bad moods (P4, P6), but it will be unrealistic to expect young children to already have the control over emotions that adults should have. Children learn to regulate their emotions in interaction with their parents. Emotion coaching takes place when parents monitor their children's emotions, assist them to label emotions and deal

constructively with it (Havighurst, 2013:249). Judging from the parents' responses, it seems as if the teaching about dealing with children's feelings, was understood and applied by the parents and that it is yielding positive results, with parents being more aware of the importance of feelings and of teaching their children to verbalise and express their feelings in an appropriate way. This lays the foundation for the development of emotion regulation, an important component of school readiness that Grade R learners need to master.

#### 6.3.6.5 *Self-control and delayed gratification*

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**  
**Session 5: Self-control and delayed gratification**

The topic of self-control and delayed gratification was introduced with a short description of the marshmallow experiment. The activity during this session was to make a robot and do the run/freeze exercise with the children. Included in the information pack was a handout with a suggested evening routine, and the importance of a fixed routine for the household to teach children self-control, was discussed.

When the parents were asked what they remembered about self-control and delayed gratification, some of them were not sure about the topic. However, when the researcher mentioned the robot exercise or the topic of routine, all the parents could respond to the question. Two trends seem to emerge from the responses that the parents provided, namely teaching their children to wait, and the importance of routine – both important elements in learning self-control.

P4 has taught her Grade R learner and the sibling that they cannot get everything that they want and when they want something, the need to save for it from their pocket money of R5 or R10 that they receive from her every week. P5 has instituted several measures to teach his Grade R child and the sibling self-discipline and self-control. The children have to do chores at home to earn things that they want. The Grade R earned a Play Station by passing his grade last year, but now the father restricts his game playing to weekends, because the children have to do homework during the week. This father has also bought his children pet rabbits to care for and to learn to take responsibility for something. P7, P8, P10, P11, P12 and P13 also confirmed that they do not have problems upholding a routine and they described various aspects of the routine that they follow. P10 insists that her children clean up where they have played before they can have a treat. This family recently went through a tough time financially and they did not have much food. The children had to wait for the grandmother to come home and dish up before they could eat, even when they were really hungry.

A positive comment by P7 was that she insisted on talking to her children about their day at school before they did anything else. This cuts across several aspects of supportive parenting and conveys to the children how important they are to their parent. This parent is partially disabled due to back problems. The reason that she tells her children that she always needs to know where they are, could stem from feelings of helplessness, because she is restricted in her movements and cannot monitor her children like other parents. However, it also plays an important role in assuring the children that they are always in the parent's thoughts (*'You told me you would come early, now why are you over this time? I need to know where were you' because he should be home at one. So I need to be very curious about my kids, where they are, what they're doing.*)

P2 and P6 were the only two parents who mentioned problems with regards to routine and self-control, since both view their Grade R's as very impatient children. P2 regarded this as a very important topic because adhering to a time schedule leads to constant confrontations between her and her child. When P6 fetches her son from aftercare, she insists that he first take off his school clothes and have tea with her before going out to play with his friends.

Although some parents could not remember the specific topic, 12 out of 13 parents were positive about teaching their children on their level to adhere to a family routine and to wait for treats and luxuries. These behaviours should undoubtedly contribute to the development of self-control, which is a significant element of school readiness.

#### 6.3.6.6 *Social development*

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**  
**Session 6: Social development**

Learning takes place in a social environment and school ready children need to possess a range of social skills, including getting along with adults and peers, sharing, taking turns and showing empathy. The importance of team work and cooperation was illustrated by the activities that were presented in this session. Teams of two learners had to run a race with marbles on a paper plate without letting the marbles fall off. Then mother and child teams had to find the missing pieces of a puzzle after which two mother and child teams had to plan and create a farmyard scene.

The parents' responses regarding their Grade R children's social skills varied, but all of them could name a few social skills that their children were capable of, namely:

*Building friendships:* All the parents reported that their children have friends and enjoy playing with them and that they get along with adults. P5 believed that his son is comfortable with other children but is slow to connect in the company of adults. He needs time to get used to strangers and only after a while will he interact with them. P2 shared that her son, who is normally shy, benefited from just seeing his mother interacting with other mothers '*... and it's okay to play with each other and then have a nice time, share, maybe work together. I think of the one class where the children had to walk together with the marbles on the plate. They had to work together. And so that was nice.*'

*Empathy:* P2 and P4 reported that their Grade R children have much empathy with others. '*He's very aware of people's emotions even, and how they act... Oh, he empathises ... He's very protective of others and their feelings.*' (P2). According to P4 her daughter cries when a friend has been treated unfairly, and, when children fight over a toy, she will give up hers and play with something else.

*Sharing:* Although P2's Grade R child is an only child, his educator reports that his social skills are fine and that he does share with others. P9 and P6 are also of the opinion that their children are good at sharing: P6: '*Ja, very well ... And sharing his toys. It's the one thing I like about him. I didn't teach him that. It just comes naturally ... Because when I bought him the piano, he immediately took it outside (to his friends)*'.

*Being helpful:* P10 recounted that her son helps around the house and he offers to help her carry bags into the house when she comes from the shop.

*Teaching good manners:* One parent (P7) reported that she teaches her children to treat everyone with respect: '*... what do you say? Good morning. No matter if that person doesn't greet back. You say good morning. No matter where you go, even if that person is drunk, you greet that person with utmost respect because that is also a human being, no matter what that person is going through.*'

*Assertiveness:* P3 reported that her son has a firm but positive way of asserting himself: '*If there's another child who is doing something which is wrong to him, he'll say, 'no, don't do that to me. I don't like it.*'

*Conflict:* P10 reported that her children sometimes fight with children who come to visit, but then she calls them inside and talks to them about proper behaviour. P13 said that her daughter is inclined to become aggressive towards other children. She then calls her aside and explains that she needs to stay calm and not become angry so quickly. The little girl then agrees to try.

The teaching of social skills contains many different elements and it is not surprising that the parents could only remember a few, especially considering that they did not write a test on the learning material. From the accounts of the parents, it seems as if almost all the Grade R children are in the process of developing the social skills that they need to have to be school ready. The activities that were presented with this topic encourage team work and all the parents and learners thoroughly enjoyed it. Future presenters of this programme could consider simplifying this topic by excluding two or three elements, depending on the target community. All things considered, this topic was a success and the parents are now much more aware of the social skills that their children need to develop to become school ready.

#### 6.3.6.7 Identity development

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**  
**Session 7: Identity development**

Apart from the need for Grade R's to know who they are, they need to be able to draw a stick figure, know their different body parts, and know basic facts about themselves and their parents, such as their names and street addresses. The activities presented with this topic were: adding the features and clothes to the outline of a person that was supposed to be themselves; exercises to name body parts; draw a stick figure; and complete the names and cell phone numbers of the parents.

Not all the parents remembered the topic and a variety of responses were given, although all of them remembered the main activity. P1 did not understand the term and gave an answer that had nothing to do with the topic. At the question whether his son knew the names of his family and their cell phone numbers, he answered affirmatively. P2 and P4 had a better idea. Although P2 said that her son does not really know who he is as a person, she added that she would like him to discover who he is, because he is small in size and she does not want him to follow the crowd one day. P4 shared with the researcher that she had recently made a comment about her daughter's dull grey hair, upon which the daughter had responded with: *'but it's my hair. God gave it to me.'* The mother apologized to her and thought to herself *'... ja, she has her own ... she knows she's her own person.'* Other parents encourage the development of identity in different ways. P6 says her son shows her his muscles and his strong chest and then she asks him to draw a picture of himself and all his relatives. She also makes him take a drawing that he has made of himself along to show his grandmother when he goes to visit. P5 points out to his children that although they

look slightly like some of their relatives, each of them has his/her own features as they grow up. P7 described the following interaction between herself and her Grade R daughter: *'First, mommy my toes, they look like yours. Maybe like my daddy's, but mostly like yours. But my hair is my daddy's. But mommy you know what, I am beautiful nê, mommy?' I say, 'Yes you are. Who told you ever that you're ugly? You were never born ugly my baby.'* P9 commented that her daughter says she looks like the dad. The parents are separated, but the girl has regular contact with the father. *'She knows her body parts and she says she looks like her dad. She has contact with him. I often tell her she is unique. I bought her a sweater saying I am unique. Then she says she is unique. She knows the meaning of the word.'* P11 accentuates the fact that his son belongs to a family, but also that he is unique. He calls his son by the nickname 'B...' and then says there is only one like him and what would he (the father) do without him. When P12 had done the activity of completing the profile of a person, she had said to him in very simple terms: *'R..., look there at me and you. We look the same, I am you mother, that is your grandfather, that is you grandmother and that is your father. There is not a brother or sister, you are my only one.'*

The process of developing an identity will continue throughout adolescence, but from the parents' accounts it seems as if their Grade R children already have a sense of self and of their distinctiveness from others, but also that they belong to a wider family. In this way two fundamental human needs are satisfied, namely the need to be unique, but also the need to belong (Brooker & Woodhead, 2008:6). The aim of this session has been achieved, namely to start the process of identity development and the feeling of belonging.

#### 6.3.6.8 How to convey values to my child

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**  
**Session 8: How to convey values to my child**

This session was accompanied by an activity where the parents and learners had to cut out four colourful pictures of balloons and paste them on cardboard. Each balloon represented values attached to a certain domain of their lives, namely personal values, family values, school values and community values. The parents and their children then had to discuss what values were important to them and write it under the appropriate balloon.

Once again, P1 could not recall this session. The other parents seemed to apply values to different areas that they deem important. P2 sees strong values as a way to prevent her child from following the crowd one day and she said she has the values chart up in the kitchen to remind her son of the values that they agreed upon. This session seems to have had quite an impact on P4's

family. P4 divulged that her Grade R daughter is now meticulous about personal hygiene and insists on washing her hair even when it is raining (hygiene was one of their values under 'personal'). There are also several areas in which she and the brother demonstrate respect and consideration for each other ('family value'). They make sure that the toilet is clean after use and they spray the toilet with air freshener. The Grade R learner insists that her bedding should be washed every second week and she washes her doll every week. She is considerate towards the parents, cleans up before the father comes home and offers to rub the mother's feet. The family also demonstrates their respect for one another by never taking money or chocolate that one family member has left somewhere. P5 commented that he tries to teach his child values as best he can. He puts the focus on religion and said that they say their prayers every day (they are of the Muslim faith) and he teaches them the same '*principles and disciplines*' that he was taught. P6 said that values is not really a topic that they consciously think about every day, whereas P7 said it is very important that her children are honest, even when they have been disobedient. '*You come and tell mom, be honest. I'm not gonna hurt you. Just be honest with mommy, I did that, I'm sorry, ...*' Then she comes to me and say, '*Mommy, I apologise mommy.*' Then she knows she did something wrong. Because if you don't apologise that's also part of disrespect.'

P8 interpreted the question about values so concretely, that she explained to the researcher that, when her grandchildren want something, she always asks them what the price is. Even explaining to this grandmother what values are, could not entice her to give a more appropriate answer. P9 is sure that her daughter knows what is right and wrong. When there is an article in the *SON* that catches this Grade R's interest, she will ask her mother questions and they will discuss it, so that the daughter can understand it better. (The researcher recommended to the parents that they must use everyday occurrences to develop values, such as happenings in the home, neighbourhood or news articles, but the researcher did not recommend reading the *Son* with the children.) P13 is strict about not tolerating foul language in the home as well as about routine, mealtimes and bedtime.

The question about values was towards the end of a long list of questions and the researcher must have skipped it, or the participating parents had to leave because of time constraints. Only eight parents were questioned on this topic, of whom two gave inappropriate or vague answers. The other six could give good, usable accounts of how they implement this topic in the upbringing of their Grade R children. Nevertheless, their responses gave the impression that values play a prominent role in their lives and that they regard the session as an important one. Moral development is an important element in developing self-regulation, and teaching children sound morals or values will no doubt contribute to school readiness.

#### 6.3.6.9 *The role of play in the development of school readiness*

**Component 2: Social and emotional development**  
**Session 9: The role of play in the development of school readiness**

The topic of play was a straightforward concept that was positively received by the parents and rekindled many childhood memories. The parents were surprised by the many games that were included in the programme that they remembered from their childhood, and, that the researcher could actually explain to them, that they had educational value.

The parents were asked what they remembered about this session and whether their children have the opportunity to play. All the parents responded that their children love to play. Some parents play with their children (P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, P8, P9, P13) and other parents let their children play with friends (P10, P11, P12). P1 said that he and his son played snakes and ladders every night and they also dance to music. P2 responded with: *'Yes. I love to play games, and yes, we put on the radio on and jump around together in the house, the three of us. So we like to have fun ...'*. P4 said she had learned that parents sometimes need to become like children to be on the child's level and she added: *'So the child can be free to say, 'Come and play that game.' Don't say no, you don't [feel like] for it. Just do it for the sake of the child.'* P7 said she is in too much pain to play with her children, but her mother plays with them. This mother went on her knees to do the finger painting with her daughter at the programme in spite of her pain. The games that were mentioned that parents play with their children were snakes and ladders (P1, P5, P9), hopscotch (P11, P12), snooker board (P8), dancing to music (P1, P2), fantasy play (P6), skipping (P9) soccer (P8) and toy cars (P12). P5 mentioned that he plays all the games with his children that they played in the programme. Two parents teach their children to share their toys (P6, P8). One parent (P13) mentioned that her daughter sometimes becomes aggressive when she plays with friends, but that this is usually when the friends are aggressive first. This parent also mentioned that her daughter has toys and can play on her own and keep herself busy, which is an important skill.

The benefits of play and the contribution that it makes to all the domains of school readiness were discussed in Chapter 4. Even incidents of anger and aggression can teach children to deal with conflict (Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:135; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:262). It is evident that the parents who attended the programme, are aware of the importance of play and they provide opportunities for their children to play. Even more positive is the number of parents who play with their children, thereby strengthening the bond between them. There are positive indications that the session on play has positive consequences for the Grade R learners, enhancing their school readiness.

**Component 3: Resilience**  
**Session 10: Teaching my child to think positively**

This session was one of the three sessions aimed at building resilience in the Grade R children as well as in their parents. The rationale for selecting this topic was discussed in Chapter 4 (see Component 3: Resilience). This topic is related to the session aimed at parental wellness, that included a teaching on positive self-talk. The activity accompanying this teaching was colouring pages with a positive affirmative statement on each.

Four parents did not give responses that could be interpreted as relevant and significant (P3, P9, P10, P13). Judging from the other nine parents' responses, it seemed as if they implemented this strategy in the meaningful domains of their lives, especially where the need was greatest. Their accounts give an idea of the inner strength that positive thinking provides and therefore they are mentioned in more detail than the other sessions.

P1 responded that he needs to teach his son to think positively and he also mentioned that he applies this to his own life. P2 felt that she needed her son to think positively because of the rejection that he has experienced from his biological father. She and her husband now encourage her son to focus on all the privileges and good things that he has, and they have incorporated this in their prayer life (*'So that also we brought in praying about those things. So when he prays, he prays for every single thing that he's got.'*). P4's Grade R daughter also incorporates positive thinking into her faith in God. When the older brother struggles with school work, she has this to say: *'... no, no, you serve a miracle God. You serve a miracle God.'* At times when the mother does not have R2 to give to the Grade R learner, she responds with: *'... ag, don't worry. God will provide for us'*. This mother finds it amazing that the Grade R can encourage her 11-year-old brother when he needs it. P5 incorporates positive thinking into the children's school and sports activities. He encourages his children every day to think positively about school, because negative thoughts will *'pull them down'* and then they will not want to work and do their best. The son also motivates himself with positive thinking about his soccer. This father expressed the hope that, if they as parents guide and teach their children to the best of their ability, the children *'can carry on what we taught them'*.

According to Parent 6, her son is small in stature and he is teased by his peers, probably also about his name. This mother encourages her son in the following way by applying positive thinking to his name and his build: *'I once wrote down his name, so I explained to him the name J. It was a*

*name of a Roman emperor and he was a very important person. I said: 'You're very important. If people say you're small, if they say you're boring, you say, 'I'm important, my name is very important. My name is very important.' 'It's a nice name, I say, everybody likes your name ... I like the name and it suits you and it's a name of a very important person.'* This mother is planning to teach her Grade R son positive self-talk because *'... he must be able to say to himself I'm powerful despite this. I might not be good there but I'm good here.'*

According to P7, the mother who is partially disabled and who lives in a bungalow that leaks when it rains, she teaches her children to think positively in the most difficult situations: *'Never think I would leave you or anything like that. Think positively. There will be a way, no matter what. You may leave this house this morning without bread. But this afternoon I'll make sure you will have a pot of food.'* This mother mentioned that her disability grant had expired and she said: *'I don't have nothing left. I don't even have shoes, clothing or anything left from my money. I just make sure my kids come before, because that's what I have to ... I'm a mother.'* This attitude corresponds with the data gathered during the three focus group discussion on the strengths in the target communities, that there are dedicated, loving parents who put the interests of their children before their own, even in dire circumstances.

The accounts of the three remaining parents are not as touching as those mentioned, but they are not without meaning. P8 simply said: *'I teach them that they have a choice.'* This may not seem so profound, but to teach children that they have a choice, is to equip them with an important tool, namely inner locus of control, and that they are not victims of outside forces. Parent P11 simply said that he applies positive thinking to himself when his children's behaviour is defiant and that he learnt through the programme to be more patient, to spend more time with his children and to understand their behaviour better. P12 said that one needs to think better of oneself, because if one thinks negatively, one will think such thoughts all the time (*"n Mens moet dink betere van 'n mens self, want as jy nou sleg gaan dink dan gaan jy nou aanmekeer dink aan daai, so jy moet betere dink van jouself.'*)

The accounts above illustrate the importance of positive thinking, especially in difficult circumstances. The following affirmative statements used by several parents and Grade R learners: *'My name is very important.'* (P6), *'There will be a way, no matter what'* (P7) and *'I teach them that they have a choice'* (P9), can carry people through difficult times.

The power of this session is evident from the responses of the parents. Thinking positively will not necessarily change challenging conditions, but it will provide the positive inner energy that will enable the parents and children to cope better with their circumstances. This positive energy could

counteract the effect of toxic stress, which is a deterrent of school readiness. It is recommended that this session be retained in any school readiness programme.

#### 6.3.6.11 Humour and fun

**Component 3: Resilience**  
**Session 11: Humour and Fun**

The session on humour and fun was one of the sessions that was planned to build resilience into the parents and Grade R learners who live in challenging situations. A page with jokes was included in the information pack. Parents and learners thoroughly enjoyed the activities of face paint and finger paint presented during this session.

Apart from two parents (P3, P9) who did not provide useful answers, the parents could recall the session about humour and fun and they could recount how they apply it in their lives. It is touching how even participants who live in difficult circumstances, can joke and have fun. P1 who lives with an abusive partner said, he and his son have a lot of fun and they play a lot. P7, the mother who is constantly in pain, could not share much about humour and fun, but she commented that her older son sometimes tries to cheer her up: *'My kids, sometimes boeta is just being out of the ordinary, you know. Then he just comes in and he starts making faces. It's like he senses I'm not in a good mood.'* P8, the grandmother who is raising her two grandchildren, said jokingly, *'We have fun, yes, they are very fond of teasing. They do not care that I am the grandmother, they tease.'* Regarding the question whether the grandmother creates a home full of fun for them, she answered: *'Yes, I love to have them with me. I have said they are my joy. They are my pride. My house will be very quiet when they are gone'*. This response did not really answer the question, but it does portray the participant's deep love for the grandchildren.

P2's response was: *'I'm always making jokes and making fun and we laugh at ourselves. It comes very easily in our house.'* P4 told about all the fun activities that she and her children do, also indoors when it rains: *'They actually did a poster three weeks ago. Also about fun and games. There were a lot of magazines cut out ... we'll just paste all the different feelings, laughing, smiling, sad, cry.'* This mother's Grade R daughter could not wait for the sessions: *'... every time she'll ask when is the class, when are we going to the auntie again. When are we gonna sing, and when are we gonna have fun?'* The mother bought her daughter a microphone. She puts on music and they have karaoke with dancing and shouting. P5 simply said that he and his children have lots of fun. P6 said that bath time is a time of fun when her son lines up all his plastic animals on the edge of the bath and he pretends that they are talking to one another. This activity is also related to

fantasy play, which is highly educational. P10, P11 and P13 confirmed that they laugh and joke a lot at home.

During the teaching, the researcher cautioned the parents that their children might tell never ending jokes, without really coming to the point, but that the parents need to pretend to listen attentively and then laugh at the jokes. Two parents (P11, P12) mentioned that they do heed this advice when their Grade R children tell long and boring jokes and they laugh with them, even when they do not find the jokes funny.

The parents' responses confirm that they are aware of the value of fun and humour and that they try to create an atmosphere of fun in their homes. This is important for children living in challenging socio-economic conditions. According to Morreall (2013:48) and Restak (2013:20) humour is an antidote to negative emotions such as stress and anger, and it enables people to put a psychological distance between themselves and the problem situation. It is empowering when a person, instead of pleading helplessness, can see something that delights him in a difficult situation. Laughter and humour are mentally and physically beneficial to people. If it is true, that humour releases stress, it is beneficial to the Grade R's (and their parents), because it enables them to focus better on the developmental tasks related to school readiness.

#### 6.3.6.12 *Parent wellness*

This topic will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **6.3.7 Parental behaviours that enhance school readiness**

The above section describes the parents' responses to questions related to the twelve sessions. For further confirmation whether the programme had achieved the desired results, the researcher returned to the literature study to determine, what parenting behaviours that are conducive to the development of school readiness, were described. The researcher then analysed the data provided by the parents to determine whether the programme had contributed to these desired parenting behaviours. The following results were obtained:

#### 6.3.7.1 *Parent-child relationship*

The literature study revealed that a secure attachment, or various aspects of a responsive, warm relationship with parents, played a role in the development of the following aspects of school readiness in young children:

- Cognitive development (Davies, 2011:44; Eshel, *et al.*, 2006:992);
- Emotional and social skills (Gerhardt, 2009:2);
- Emotional development (Davies, 2011:9; Goleman, (introduction) *In* Lantieri, 2008:2);
- Moral development (Kopp, 2002:10; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:241);

- Approaches to learning (Furrer and Skinner, 2003:158);
- Relationship-building skills (Dowling, 2014:37; Kraemer, 2011:2; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:232);
- Pro-social skills ((Davies, 2011:256; King, *et.al.* 2005:318, 336; Smith, *et al.* (2011:304);
- Self-esteem (Kaplan & Owens, 2004:77; Pinto, *et al.*, 2015:592; Roberts, 2002:111; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:491; Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011:761); and
- Self-efficacy (Schunk & Pajares, 2002:4-5).

Martin, *et al.* (2010:146) and Pitt, *et al.* (2013:3) confirm that optimal cognitive, behavioural-, social and emotional development of preschoolers is promoted by the warmth and responsivity provided by a mother.

Because of the role that the parent-child relationship plays in enhancing school readiness, the one overarching goal during the designing of the prototype was identified as, building a warm, responsive relationship between parents and their Grade R children. One of the questions of the semi-structured interview with parents was, how the programme had influenced their relationship with their Grade R children. Here is a summary of the parents' responses with regards to this question:

- Seven of the parents indicated that their relationship with their child had improved significantly (P4, P6, P9, P11, P12, P13).
- Other parents (P1, P2, P5, P7) said that, although they have had a bond with their children previously, the quality of their relationship had improved and they now laugh and play (P1), they are sharing more (P2), the Grade R son has opened up and will now ask the mother things (P5), and the Grade R's lone time with the mother has become important to the Grade R (P7).
- Five parents indicated that, while their child had been closer to another caregiver before, the children had grown closer to the parents since the programme (P3, P4, P11, P12, P13). Two of these parents are the biological fathers. P4 (a mother) described the change as such: *'She was her daddy's girl. Never talked to me, never would have listened to me. She would just do what her daddy tells her to do ... But since the classes there's a ... we actually laugh together, we play together ... She always asked the daddy to come lay next to her. And it actually bothered me a lot because who am I then? I'm then the mother. But since this 'My child's a winner' programme at school, it made a difference between us. We actually had a girls' day ... Actually that touched me the most, she didn't even ask, I wonder what's daddy doing?'*
- The one grandmother (P8) remarked that, not only had her relationship with her grandson improved, but also that her grandson had become noticeably closer to his own biological

mother and now he wants to phone her every night. It is difficult to interpret this improvement and it is not known whether other factors played a role.

- P5, P6, P11 and P13 mentioned that, for the first time, their children came to ask them things or talk about things, indicating an important improvement in the relationship. P12 said that her son now brings his educator's message book to her every evening to share with her what the educator had said.
- One parent (P10) gave a response to the above question that was not indicative of the quality of the relationship, although the question was repeated.

In total 12 of the 13 parents interviewed confirmed that their relationship with their Grade R child had improved. Such warm and caring relationships lay the foundation for the development of school readiness and this can be regarded as a strong outcome of the programme.

#### 6.3.7.2 *Interaction of parents with their Grade R children*

The programme was planned to promote interaction between parents and their Grade R children. As discussed in chapter 2, literature confirmed the important role that parents' positive interaction with their children plays in the development of school readiness. It contributes to the development of:

- Cognitive development (Dowling, 2014:35; Jackson & Needham, 2014:39; Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:93; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:71; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:56;)
- Literacy and numeracy (Lukie, *et al.*, 2014:257)
- Self-regulation (Davies, 2011:44)
- Prosocial behaviour (Farrant, *et al.*, 2012:183; Nantel-Vivier, *et al.*, 2014:1141)
- Moral development (Thompson & Twibell, 2009:214; Dunn, 2006, in Smith, *et al.*, 2011:305).

The data provided by the parents were analysed to determine whether the programme had contributed to an improved parent-child interaction. The following responses were provided by the parents in this regard:

The opportunity to interact with their children in the programme, was described by some parents as '*amazing*' (P1), '*the highlight*' (P2), '*I think we enjoyed it more than the children*' (P6), '*the best part of it all*' (P7) and '*together, us alone, quality time*' (P11).

Several parents commented that the interaction with their children was the strongest feature of the programme. Here are some of the comments:

P2: '*And when we got to do the activities, that was the highlight. For every child and every parent, I'm sure. You start to learn who your child is as well going through the activities.*'

P4: *'We were actually thinking about can't we make it till two o'clock. Because the fun and what you learn there, they're actually eager to learn more.'*

P5: *'But for you to see how your kid's face lights up when he does something and he's proud of it, that's something that I enjoyed as well. I enjoyed myself to see my son, 'Daddy, look what I did, daddy, look I did this ...' It's interacting with the kids. Doing things with them that makes it satisfying at the end of the day ... Because at the end of the day it's supposed to be parents and children interacting together.'*

P7: *'But the best part of it all is interaction with your child. Just seeing my daughter happy, interacting.'*

P8: *'I enjoyed the ...the parent and child being together, those things singing and sharing with the child, because for me it was about the child.'*

Although the parents indicated that the interaction during the programme was enjoyable, it was important to determine whether this interaction extended into the homes and lives of the parents and Grade R learners, otherwise it would have been of little benefit. The following was found:

As mentioned, P1 indicated that he and his son still play snakes and ladders every evening and that they sing and dance to music. *'We did things that we still do every night.'* The fact that this boy has such a close relationship with his father, probably shields him somewhat from the detrimental effect of the abuse that he and his father suffer through the mother.

P2: *'You start to learn who your child is as well, going through the activities. You realise that okay, my child is shy, or sometimes he's not sure of himself, or something like that. So you do actually get to learn about your child.'*

P3: *'Now it's different. I learned that you, even if you are a busy mom, you can give your kids two hours. It makes a difference in your life. Every day if you give them two hours, to be with them, listen to them, play with them, ask them what they want.'*

P8: *'It was about the child, what the parent and child could do together. And then at home we also do it ... I enjoyed the ...the parent and child being together, those things, singing and sharing with the child, because for me it was about the child. W... also enjoyed it ... and he showed the people at home.'*

P9: *'The physical contact that one has with one's child, that was the best. It means a lot to them, because she will still come to me and say, 'Mommy I love you.'* This mother mentioned later that she and her Grade R daughter still have regular physical contact, they play hopscotch, and when the daughter takes out the faces chart, they talk about feelings.

P11: *'The programme taught me to control my temper and also to spend more time with my children ... there I realized once again that to spend time with one's children makes things so much better. Much better. Then one learns to understand that child and why they sometimes do the things that they do. It gave me much more understanding in terms of the upbringing of the child.'* This father said later that, no matter how busy he is, he will always listen to his Grade R son when the latter wants to sing him a song.

Putting together all the responses from the previous discussion of the topics of play and humour and fun, it is evident that all the parents seem much more aware of the importance of positive interaction with their Grade R's, spending quality time, and doing fun things together.

#### 6.3.7.3 Home learning environment

The importance of a home learning environment to promote the development of school readiness skills, was also confirmed in literature. Such a home learning environment would be print rich and include activities such as reading to children, providing books, drawing materials, songs and games. This promotes the following domains of school readiness:

- Cognitive development (Jackson & Needham, 2014:39; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:187; Fantuzzo, *et al.*, 2004:474);
- Pre-literacy (Dove, *et al.*, 2015:174; Ngwaru, 2012:34; Smith, *et al.*, 2011:421; Bracken & Fishel, 2008:45; Machet & Pretorius, 2003:40; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998:848; Lara-Cinisomo, *et al.*, 2004:14; Farver, *et al.*, 2006:207);
- Pre-numeracy (Lukie, *et al.*, 2014:257);
- Self-regulation (Baker, 2013:184; Calkins & Williford, 2009:186; Fantuzzo, *et al.*, 2004:474);
- Approaches to learning (Baker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2014:730; Baker, *et al.*, 2012:847);
- Prosocial behaviour (Brownell, *et al.*, 2013:n.p.);
- Self-efficacy (Schunk & Pajares, 2002: 4-5).

According to Kaplan and Owens (2004:75) parents' involvement in home based educational activities conveys the message to children that education is valued and important.

It needs to be remembered that the parents who attended the programme, do not necessarily have the means to buy books and other educational resources. That is one of the factors that makes the difference when children are raised in a low socio-economic environment. However, not all the

parents have financial constraints, but they need to be aware of the importance of a home learning environment. The following data with regards to home learning environment were provided by the parents:

P1 *'We use the dices of the snakes and ladders to teach him to add.'*

P2 mentioned that they do all the activities at home and it is easy and fun. She even shares with the ECD class that she attends every week the activities that she learns at the programme. When asked what she had learnt that she could still apply, she added: *'The fact that you have to be consistent, because after ... a person has different things to do in a day and so today you feel too tired to do it, but the child is looking forward to doing that, a certain thing with you. So ja, make time for everything.'*

P4 responded: *'Now since we had those classes, she liked colouring in. She would not sit with papers before. Many of the copies that you gave us, I made copies of that and now she colours in. Now she calls the friend from next door and they the two of them play 'teacher-teacher' and so she will colour in and talk and try to make a story of the picture. She is progressing well ... And so she improved. We still use much of the little books and stuff that you gave us.'*

P6 gave much information: *'Like the drawing. The colouring in. And distinguishing between objects on the papers ... So I still show him the things. Like the drawings, nature. And then, I read to him ... I have it in a book. I can take it out anytime. Interesting stuff ... So I helped him with that reading. I said you need to know their names. ... at home he counts up to a hundred on the chart. But then she [the educator] said to me the last time, he could only count to 39... But, I believe he will eventually progress. He will. Because it's not that I'm neglecting in any way, and even my family when he's there, I always say to him, 'Listen, go and do this tonight just for five minutes', especially when I'm [at] work, but then my sister does it. The researcher checked with her curriculum colleagues and a Grade R child does not have to count that far.'*

P7 said: *'Now S [a friend] likes to sit with books. She is a little older than her, but when they sit with books, they sit and they colour, and then she comes and show me, 'Mommy, we did this picture, we did this now,' or she takes some beads and stuff and then they 'sommer' make stuff for them.'* This mother remarked how much her daughter had enjoyed the sessions: *'But she was actually enthusiastic to do these things. She was more excited than me because she woke me up in the morning. Come mommy. Then its six o'clock. We need to go to school... (Do you read to her?) When I do get time then I sit. Or she brings me a book, just some book. 'Mommy, come let's read.'* Earlier during the interview the mother remarked: *'At home L loves to do the buttons. But she does it in a counting manner. She counts the buttons, or the holes, how many holes are there.'*

P10: *'Yes, I read it to him (the stories), and he sits still, but there's also other children coming here, so I tell them they must sit there on the bed and then I read it to them. And they sit still.'*

P8: *'Playing snakes and ladders and W... showed his aunties to make masks, but anyway, he (the older brother) will draw pictures and W... will cut out. Their auntie shows them to apply the glitter without spilling and how to design. We let the grandfather join the library and the aunties read to the children starting with W... so they read quite a bit.'*

P9: *'Yes, and afterwards ... she likes cutting. She made herself another mask at home. This mother also helps her daughter with 'homework'.'*

During the interview with Parent 11, the Grade R and the older sibling were present and they kept themselves busy with colouring pages that the researcher had provided. These children urged their father to join the local library and he undertook to do that. Earlier in the interview this parent said that all the activities of the programme are easy to replicate at home, but he did not provide details and the researcher did not explore further.

Parent 12: *'At the back of the picture that they have to colour in, then I read to him the picture, I read the message to him, then I help him to colour in.'*

P13 also had much to say on this topic: *'I have a book at home for Grade 1, it is for example 1 + 1 and so, then I copy from the book and ask her to fill in the answers. Then she fills it in ...I give her more, I go through her books, I say to her, 'D..., come mommy read to you and then you tell mommy what was the story about.' I took out library books for her ... And she says I must sing to her before she goes to sleep.'*

Three parents mentioned that they play music and dance with their children, which also contribute to a home learning environment.

One parent who was not interviewed, came to the researcher during the programme and remarked that, since the stories were included in the information pack, she read to her Grade R child every evening. Another mother remarked that her daughter asked repeatedly: *'When are we going to that place where we get the stories?'*

It needs to be kept in mind that some of these parents might themselves not be familiar with books, numeracy and literacy, and not all of them seemed to stimulate their Grade R's intentionally with educational activities. When Parent 10 was questioned on whether she did the activities with her Grade R son, she said that some days she does the activities and other days she forgets. However, it does seem as if the majority of parents are more aware of the value of creating

reading opportunities for their children and stimulating their development on a cognitive level. This should make a difference in the Grade R learners' school readiness.

### **6.3.8 Parent wellness**

The session about parent wellness included two short sections, one about a healthy lifestyle and the other about self-talk and how negative self-talk can be changed. The importance of parents feeling positive about themselves was mentioned, and the researcher also remarked several times that some of the topics were not only for the benefit of the Grade R's, but also for everybody, for example dealing with feelings and thinking positively. Some parents took this to heart and the following data pertaining to parental wellbeing was shared during the interviews:

P1 said he does a lot of positive talking to himself.

P3 found value in the session about self-image. *'Actually when you were teaching the sections that touched me, actually which really, really made a big impact was the first section, love and self-image... Self-image, when you know who you ... because to me I didn't know who I am also. But when you taught about the self-image you have got the right to say no to this, you have got the right to say yes to this.'*

P4 takes a holistic view and nurtures herself physically, emotionally and cognitively: *'To me actually I don't eat meat anymore. I just eat chicken and I will have veggies. I actually do make two pots in the evening, one for the house and one for myself, and I feel great. I drink water, I walk a lot and I actually talk when I feel emotional. I will go to a friend and just express and just cry or just let out. I was a person that actually cropped everything. And since that I will just let go. And I don't bother me about petty things anymore, work me up and just let it go... I feel great.'*

P5 *'What have I learnt? Well, you learn a bit of everything. Self-motivation, social development, ...'*

P6 (a nurse) found much value in several topics, especially positive self-talk. She verbalized the fact that parents who feel good about themselves, can convey the positive feeling to their children. She said the following: *'If you feel good about yourself, they will also feel good about themselves. And as a parent, like I say, when I started applying the self-talk, it helped a lot ... I cannot go to work without saying to myself that I'm confident enough in my job. I'm able to do far more than I can think of. I must do that, because is such simple but heavy issues that arises in the workplace. You don't plan for it, it just happens. The self-talk became very important to me after this session, because I realised I need to do that before I leave the house, because you don't know what's happening and waiting on you in the ward. It was easier to teach him (her Grade R son) self-esteem, and then I could apply it to myself as well. Self-talk became a very important aspect in my*

*life... I have so much more energy. I actually took that for myself more than I applied it to him. It starts with me first. So it helped me a lot, more than all the other lessons that we've had, in the parent wellness self-talk, it has helped me a lot.'*

P9 had this to say: *'Yes, I have benefitted. I am a very shy person and now I have more self-confidence. Thank you very much for all that you have done for us. I appreciate it.'*

P11 could not be more specific about personal wellness, but after exploring a little, he said that he and his wife go out and they make time to spend together.

P7 summed it up: *'... it needs to be included'* (the wellness topic). *'We as parents need to know that we also need ...'* (Nurturing?) *'Yes we do.'*

P13 said she sometimes goes out to the shops and visits her cousin for a chat.

P8, P10 and P12 could not mention anything pertaining to themselves, they could only focus on the children and what value the programme had for them.

The importance of parental wellness was discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. From the accounts of the parents it seems as if some parents could use the teaching to apply it to their own lives with positive consequences. The four parents who could not confirm that they apply the wellness principles to themselves, are parents who live in challenging circumstances and they might find it difficult to grasp the fact that they are people in their own right who have the right to have their personal needs fulfilled.

The importance of parents having emotional support and networking with other parents was also discussed in Chapter 4 (see 4.4.4). A difference was found in the way that parents of the Saturday groups (Schools P and N) and the group during the week (School R) networked. The Saturday groups attended the programme with their children, sometimes with an additional sibling, and they returned to their shopping and other weekend activities straight after the group. The parents who attended the group at School R during the week, had time to be alone with other parents before they went to fetch their Grade R children. The researcher noticed that some of them started to arrive earlier and were socialising comfortably by the time that the researcher arrived at the school. They would banter with each other and became more relaxed and friendly. Although the parents in the Saturday groups also chatted during the tea breaks, there was never that close interaction. The following responses were provided by parents from School R with regards to interaction with other parents:

P1, who is much older than the average Grade R parent, expressed his joy in getting to know other parents. He loves talking to the parents of the group when he fetches his son in the afternoons.

P2 said the following about what she liked most about the programme: *'The most was interaction.'* [Of whom, with whom?] *'Of the parents with each other. It wasn't too free so that a person would just start talking nonsense and wasting time. There was something we were talking about. I liked the interaction ... Yes, and talking to each other, supporting each other. And in that way children also become friends, because I see he and C may gravitate towards each other as well.'*

To the same question, P6 remarked: *'The way you lectured and also later on the interaction with other parents. We got used to each other afterwards, talking to each other, we shared a lot. Then you realise you're not alone. You also battling with your child with that, so now she's also battling with her child. I still see a lot of the other parents also at the Mall and we still chat a lot.'*

Even P5, the father who was teased quite a bit by the mothers, had the following to say: *'I liked everything, I mean, we got to meet parents that we never knew, because the only time we ever see them is at a school meeting. But for me, I've got to know a few people. They Whatsapp, chatting, and phoning, do you have this, do you have that? So I mean, even after the sessions they're still communicating. We still have, how we're doing, see each other in the morning.'*

The success in building up the confidence and wellbeing of the parents was a by-product of the programme, but by no means an unimportant one. The parents' responses give the impression that the programme was a safe space for them to interact and that they could build their confidence as parents.

### **6.3.9 Researcher's attitude to make parents feel welcome**

In Chapter 1 the matter of working with vulnerable populations and the responsibility that the researcher faced to be warm and welcoming towards the participants, was discussed (see 1.4.3.3). Although this was not a separate question, a few parents made remarks indicating that they felt at home, enjoyed the programme and they were not hesitant to ask questions. They said the following:

P3: *'... you wanted us to understand and then you said to us we must ask where we don't understand. That part, if I don't understand I must ask. So to me you were open.'*

P4 *'Really, really, I'm satisfied with each and every module you gave us. It made a huge difference in my household, as a mother, as a wife, and as a parent to other children.'*

P5: *'Everything was clear. If we didn't understand anything, we would actually ask you.'*

P6: *'...you were like one of us. None of us knew you when you came in, but you did become like one of us. You would walk around, come to us at the tables and talk to us. Everybody spoke about that. They actually liked that.'* This parent also remarked: *'...you spoke in simple language, even with the fathers that were there. They normally they're always on their own, but they joined in.'*

P8 *'How to work with children, how to respect children and I learnt a lot, let me say that. Because see, my children are grown-up and I now started with these ones. Also how to be humble and show love.'*

P9: *'I was like a child, because I looked forward to them'* [the sessions].

At the last session at School R the parents gave the researcher a gift pack of toiletries and a card with messages from each parent. The researcher thanked the parents warmly and she perceived the pleasure that the parents derived from giving something back.

It does seem evident from these quotes and other data already provided, that the researcher reached the goal of bridging the gap between herself as a professional and the participants, and that they enjoyed the programme.

#### **6.3.10 General comments about the parenting programme**

At the closing ceremony and handing out of the certificates, the principal of school P and school N said a few words of thanks to the researcher on behalf of these schools that took part in the parenting programmes. The principal of School P said the following: *'From our side, Mrs Brown, we are so grateful that you chose our school to do this programme ... We live in a society where there is such a lack of love and good parental care. I haven't heard about anybody who give training to raise a child, and here was the wonderful opportunity to get some information to help a parent to mould the child. You've done it. I think its wonderful work from your side.'* The principal of School N expressed words to the same effect. At school R the researcher's circuit team manager attended the ceremony instead of the principal and he also expressed warm words of appreciation for the work that the researcher had done.

During the programme the researcher sometimes distributed scraps of paper on which parents could anonymously share their thoughts about the programme. Sixteen notes in total were received. All of them were positive about the programme and examples are the following:

Since my child and I started this class I can see that he has more confidence in doing his work at school as well as home. He is eager to learn just so that I can praise him. The brag bag is a huge success in my opinion. Hope to learn so much more here. S.L.

Workshop of today was informative. I enjoyed the breathing and feelings exercise.

I have come here from the first Saturday ... you are doing a great job. I wish every parent feel the way I do. It really helps the child. Especially the parent. We not at school with them every day but when but when I come here it feels a person can go to school with them everyday. I really appreciate this and will attend every week ... this is helping me as a single parent to develop my child's development as a learner at P...

I enjoy the classes very much and also learn how to understand my daughter and since we attend the classes, we listen to and understand each other better. The classes have done wonders. Will recommend it to all parents. Thank you very much. N.K.

Dear Miss Brown, I am very happy you come up with this program. I need this time with my child as I have more children. This time I came here with my child I get to have some q-time with her. Thank you very much for your time and helping to improve from a young age. S.O.

Last week was my first session here and we really enjoyed it a lot. K... is making use of the facial expression page, she always change it on the page with the peg. She is a good well mannerd child as this experience is a little bit more encouraging for us both to continue having a good relationship between parents and the child. Thank you for the excellent work you

This is a great experience and I have learnt a lot how to deal and manage my child. I have excepted my child is only a baby and not and adult, so I'm treating him as a baby. This experience can only benefit me and him in the future. C.J.

## 6.4 CONCLUSION

The parenting programme was implemented in three schools and thirteen parents were interviewed to evaluate the success of the programme. This chapter contains a discussion of the data obtained through the interviews.

According to the parents, it seems as if the logistical arrangements were satisfactory. Recruiting parents for such a programme through the school and presenting it at schools was successful and it points out the importance of the cooperation of a school in such a venture. The parents were questioned on a wide variety of aspects on how they experienced the programme. Although some parents were more eloquent and could express themselves better than other parents, enough data were collected to judge the success of the programme, as well as the appropriateness of the different components of the programme.

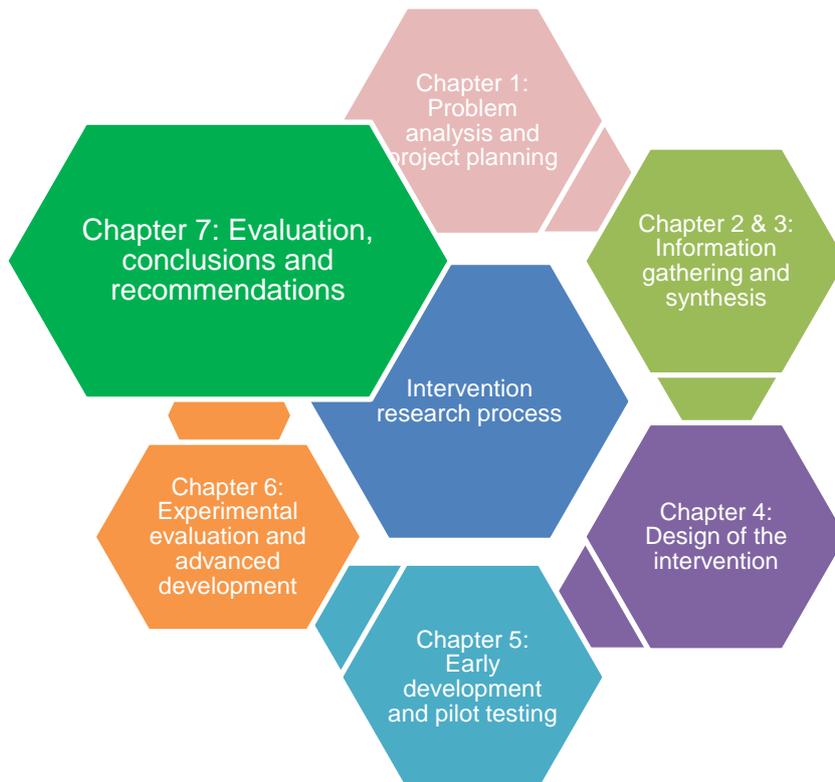
Qualitative research does not yield results measured in numbers and concrete figures. However, it produces rich and in-depth information with regards to the varied and subjective experience that individuals have and the meaning that they attach to their experiences and their lives. The interviews with the participating parents produced such data. The parents who were interviewed gave accounts of the unique way in which each of them experienced the parenting programme and how they applied it in their lives. They mostly agreed on important issues, but they offered it in different ways. Especially significant for the purposes of school readiness, was the data concerning the three parenting behaviours that the researcher identified from the literature, namely the parent-child relationship, parent-child interaction and creating a home learning environment. From the parents' accounts, there are indications of improvement in all three these parenting behaviours, that lay the foundation for the development of school readiness.

Judging from the data gathered through the thirteen interviews with the parents, it seems as if the parenting programme was a success and it reached the proposed aim and objectives. Chapter 7 contains an evaluation of the programme as well as conclusions. Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research will also be discussed.

## CHAPTER 7

### EVALUATION, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Phase 6: Evaluation, conclusions and recommendations



#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter the research will be summarized and evaluated in terms of the research question that was formulated in Chapter 1. An evaluation will also be made of the suitability of intervention research as a framework for the development and implementation of the parenting programme leading to the fulfilment of the aim and objectives of the study. The application of research methodology will be reflected on. There will be an overview of aspects that are relevant to trustworthiness and ethics. The chapter will conclude with the limitations of the study, conclusions based on the different chapters, and recommendations for the further implementation of the programme within a social work context.

## **7.2 PHILOSOPHICAL PARADIGM**

All research needs to take place within the framework of certain philosophical assumptions or viewpoints (Creswell, 2013:18; Lombard, 2016:8). The researcher entered the research situation with her own training, value system and deep-rooted assumptions (Creswell, 2013:19, 25). The researcher had to consciously adopt a specific philosophical stance, and 'position' herself to be aware of how her own culture, background and values could influence the interpretation of the research results (Creswell, 2013:25). It was a qualitative study and the social constructivist stance that the researcher adopted, formed the ideal framework within which the research could take place. From an ontological viewpoint, the researcher assumed that there are multiple realities, that reality is socially constructed, that the participants could have varied, and that multiple interpretations for the same circumstances could occur (Creswell, 2013:24; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:9; Teater, 2014:77). From an epistemological viewpoint, the researcher endeavoured to enter the world of the participants and put measures in place to bridge the distance that socio-economic and cultural differences could have placed between the researcher and the participants (Creswell, 2013:20). The practical way in which this was done, is discussed later in this chapter (see section 7.3.2.2). This philosophical paradigm informed the research methodology and offered the opportunity to gather rich and varied data, portraying the way that the participants construct their reality as described by Engelbrecht (2016:110) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016:6), as well as the unique way in which they experienced the parenting programme.

## **7.3 EVALUATION OF THE RESEARCH**

During the initial exploration of the problem, it was found that school readiness not only impacts profoundly on individual children's school careers and long-term successful functioning, but it also has economic implications for a country. Education is a powerful tool against poverty, and generally children who enter the formal school system when they are not school ready, do not catch up. The result is that they fall behind gradually, which leads to early school drop-out and poor career prospects. In low socio-economic communities with parents under adverse circumstances, the possibility of children not being school ready, is greater than in more affluent communities, due to the challenges that poverty brings forth. Because of the vitally important role that parents play in the development of school readiness, (as discussed in Chapter 2), the researcher explored the possibility that there could be existing parenting programmes to guide parents how to parent in adverse socio-economic circumstances, and how to prepare their Grade R children to be school ready. In the absence of an appropriate programme, intervention research was deemed the most suitable research method to help develop a programme that social workers themselves could apply when they do not have a colleague to assist them.

### 7.3.3 Aim and objectives of the study

During the planning phase one aim and four objectives were formulated for the study. The aim of this study was to use intervention research to develop a parenting skills programme, aimed at enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners in resource poor communities. Step 1 and step 2 of the first phase were to obtain the necessary ethical clearance and permission from the Western Cape Education Department. These permissions were obtained as referred to in Chapter 1. The rest of the process that the researcher followed to achieve the aim and the objectives was the following:

<b>Phase 2: Information gathering and synthesis</b> The literature study was step 3 of phase 2 of the intervention process	
<p>Objective 1: To conduct a literature study to develop a conceptual framework on the construct of school readiness and to examine the role of parenting in the development of school readiness (Chapter 2: <i>The role of parenting in the development of school readiness in grade R learners: a conceptual framework</i>).</p>	<p>The following steps were taken to reach this objective: This step consisted of a literature study focusing on the concept of school readiness in the South African context, and the role that parents play in the development of school readiness.</p> <p>The researcher used several databases to obtain literature: the library services of NWU through the website and the subject librarian, the library of the University of Stellenbosch, the library service of the WCED, Edulis and several search engines on the Internet. In line with the recommendation of Bless, <i>et al.</i> (2013:49) the researcher conducted interdisciplinary searches including social work, psychology, education, paediatrics and nursing. Manual and online searches were conducted and academic books, journals and E-journals were mostly used. The researcher endeavoured to find primary sources by searching for references used by other researchers. Sometimes the references that were cited were not the primary source and in other instances the sources were not recent enough. Older resources were used when the authors had written developmental theories that were generally accepted as authoritative, or when several recent authors used their work as a reference. The only limiter that was used to narrow the scope of the searches on websites, was year of publication and only full-text publications that were used, as recommended by Onwuegbuzie</p>

	<p>and Frels (2012:36-37).</p> <p>In contrast to literature studies in quantitative research, the literature study was a continuous procedure throughout the research process (Blaikie, 2010:17-18; Williams, <i>et al.</i>, 2005:78) The literature study was not a goal in itself, but a step in the process to identify the functional elements or components of the parenting programme that the researcher planned to develop (De Vos &amp; Strydom, 2011:480; Rothman &amp; Thomas, 1994:31-33). The researcher searched for resources according to the domains of school readiness as described in literature, and then searched for research documentation about the role that parents play in the development of these domains. Although the researcher also searched for literature regarding existing parenting programmes, journal articles on most of these programmes do not describe the content of the programmes. The results of the literature study are described in Chapter 2. Different sources were included until the researcher felt that an adequate overview, representative of the existing body of knowledge, had been included (Onwuegbuzie &amp; Frels, 2012:29).</p> <p>The researcher is satisfied that the objective was reached and that the literature offers a reliable portrayal of school readiness and the role of parents in the school readiness of Grade R learners.</p>
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<p><b>Phase 2: Information gathering and synthesis</b></p> <p>The focus group discussions formed step 4 of phase 2 of the intervention process</p>	
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<p>Objective 2: To ascertain the strengths and problems of parenting practices and school readiness in two resource poor communities, by conducting focus groups with educators,</p>	<p>The following steps were taken to reach this objective: During this phase of the research, data were collected through three focus group discussions with the professionals and parents of Grade 1 learners in these communities.</p> <p><i>Sampling and data collection:</i> The main purpose of a focus group is to discuss a specific topic in a gathering of individuals that are homogenous in a certain area (Hays &amp; Singh, 2012:252). Due to</p>
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<p>professionals and parents of Grade 1 learners in these communities.</p>	<p>the poor attendance by the parents, it was considered whether the group could be regarded as a focus group. However, since Braun and Clarke (2013:115) still consider a group of as few as three participants a focus group, it was decided to continue regarding this group as a focus group. The aim of the focus groups was to obtain information from the professionals and parents regarding the constructs of parenting and school readiness specific to those communities. Participants were purposefully selected. According to Hays and Singh (2012:255) Guthrie (2010:121) and Walliman (2011:100), participants need not necessarily be representative of the population, because they are purposively selected to obtain information on a specific topic.</p>
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- The social workers of the welfare agency delivering services in the target community were all invited by e-mail to participate, after permission had been obtained from their supervisor.
- The foundation phase educators in one of the target schools were all invited by letter to participate after the permission of the principal had been obtained.
- The parents of Grade 1 learners in another target school were invited by letter after the principal's permission to conduct the group in the school had been obtained. They had to be parents who were available during the day and who came to fetch their children at the school.

*Informed consent:* The researcher explained the purpose of the focus groups and obtained informed written consent from all participants. The concepts confidentiality and voluntary participation were explained to them. The researcher asked the permission of participants to make an audio recording of each session.

*Data collection:* The focus group discussions were semi-structured according to an interview schedule with open-ended questions as described by Guthrie (2010:121) and Walliman (2011:99). In both focus group discussions with the professionals, the participants mostly confirmed one another's comments and shared information

on a professional and not a personal level. The parents were not as talkative as the professionals and had to be encouraged to participate, but the data that they provided, corresponded with that which were provided by the professionals. The discussions focused on the problems pertaining to parenting and school readiness, since the programme was aimed at addressing these problems.

*Data analysis:* The focus group discussions as captured on audio recorder, were transcribed verbatim to allow for maximum accuracy before a thematic analysis was done. According to Braun and Clarke (2013:178), thematic analysis is a way to analyse and organise data in order to identify meaningful patterned responses or themes regarding the research question. To identify themes, the data have to be coded. Walliman (2011:133) and Nieuwenhuis (2016:116) describe the coding process as to analyse and divide data into more compact and meaningful units of analysis. After reading and rereading the transcriptions, the data were coded to identify repetitive patterns across the three focus group discussions, to compare the different views expressed and to capture the richness of the information divulged. The themes that emerged across the data set were remarkably similar and no contradictions were found. The results of the three focus group discussions were then collated according to identified themes, and vivid extracts conveying the spirit of the interviews were identified and added (Braun & Clarke, 2006:86). In documenting the results, the researcher returned to literature to control the findings. The researcher probed deeper to reveal meaningful connections and to bring the data into context with the findings in literature.

The results of the focus group discussions were described in Chapter 3. The researcher believes that Objective 2 – probing the strengths and weaknesses of parenting and school readiness in the target communities – was reached.

### **Phase 3: Design of the intervention**

The design and development of the prototype formed step 5 in phase 3 of the intervention process

<p>Objective 3: To design a prototype parenting skills programme based on the data collected above (Chapter 4).</p>	<p><i>Design and Development</i></p> <p>The criteria for school readiness and the role that parents play as described in literature (the ideal) were coded with one word per concept and compared to the problems with school readiness and parenting in the target areas (the deficits), as revealed during the focus group discussions. From this coding exercise, the areas where parenting behaviour in the target communities needed to change, emerged and the components of a parenting programme were deducted from that data.</p> <p>The research question was answered by identifying the following three broad components:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parent-child relationship</li> <li>• Social and emotional development</li> <li>• Resilience</li> </ul> <p>Twelve topics addressing the components were deducted and the parenting programme was developed around the topics. Each session included a wide range of activities related to the topics, focussing on emotional and social skills, but also addressing a range of physical and cognitive school readiness skills. Activities in each session could be covered in one hour and they could be presented by the researcher, regardless of whether she had an assistant or not. With the prescribed resources, this programme could be replicated by any social worker. The researcher is satisfied that the third objective of developing a parenting programme, was reached.</p>
<p><b>Phase 4: Early development and pilot testing</b></p> <p>The implementation of the parenting programme formed step 6 in phase 4 of the intervention research</p>	
<p>Objective 4: To present the parenting skills programme in two schools in resource poor communities, and assess</p>	<p>Implementing the programme</p> <p>The action to fulfil the first part of Objective 4, namely to present the parenting programme in the target communities, was executed in the following way:</p> <p>The prototype or preliminary intervention was not pre-tested, but</p>

<p>the effect of the programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners, by using qualitative data.</p>	<p>was implemented simultaneously in three schools in the two target areas. This process is described in detail in Chapter 5.</p> <p>Developing, implementing and evaluating a programme in a 'real-world' situation, such as a school, require flexibility to deal with contingencies beyond the control of the researchers (Mishna, <i>et al.</i>, 2012:137-140). Although these authors caution against the challenge of obtaining the approval and cooperation of school principals and governing bodies, the researcher already had a positive working relationship with the target schools, and the principals and governing bodies welcomed the implementation of the planned parenting programme.</p> <p>Sampling: No deliberate sampling was done to recruit participants for the parenting programme (Participant group 2), but all the parents of Grade R learners in the three target schools P, N and R were regarded as potential participants. Inclusion criteria for the parents were the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents of Grade R learners in one of the target schools</li> <li>• Afrikaans or English speaking</li> </ul> <p>There was one exclusion criterion, namely that parents could not be current or past clients of the researcher.</p> <p>This process of sampling resembled the EPSEM or equal probability of selection method. According to Babbie (2010:199), a basic principle of this method of sampling is when all members of the population have an equal chance of being included in the sample.</p> <p>All the Grade R parents of the three target schools were invited to participate in the programme through talks at the parent meetings and through letters that were sent to parents by the principals. The Grade R learners were included in the invitation and this inclusion proved to be one of the successful features of the programme, as described in Chapter 6. Inclusion criterion for participants in Participant group 3 was that they had to be the Grade R children (between the age of 5 and 6 years) of the parents in Participant group 2.</p> <p>Motivating the parents to stay in the programme proved to be a</p>
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	<p>challenge, as was experienced by other social workers. Some parents attended the first session and then dropped out, which is not unusual for attendance of parenting programmes (Participant SW1-6; McWey, <i>et al.</i>, 2015:1083; Mishna, <i>et al.</i>, 2012:137-140). This problem was addressed in Chapter 5.</p> <p>Fulfilling the first part of Objective 4 was completed as described above.</p>
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**Phase 5: Evaluation and advanced development**

Evaluation and advanced development formed step 7 of phase 5 of the intervention process

<p>Objective 4: To present the parenting skills programme in two schools in resource poor communities, and assess the effect of the programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners, by using qualitative data.</p>	<p>To fulfil the second part of this objective, the following steps were taken:</p> <p>Evaluation: To determine the effect of the parenting programme, nine interviews were conducted with parents who had attended all or most of the sessions. Four parents from school R, four parents from school P and one parent from school N were interviewed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted and an interview guide was used. The interview guide was compiled to assess the logistical aspects of the programme, possible improvements in parenting behaviours and the effect that this had had on the development and school readiness of the Grade R learners. The parents were encouraged to be objective and to comment on what they did not like, and how the parenting programme could be improved. All the parents gave positive accounts of their own experience of the programme and how it had impacted on their Grade R children. The data that they provided was fairly uniform and no indication was found that the programme needed to be developed further.</p> <p>Advanced development: Although the programme was in the stage of advanced development, it was decided that no</p>
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	<p>significant adaptations to the prototype were necessary, based on the data collected through the interviews with the nine parents. Minor alterations to the parenting programme were put in place and the programme was again presented in School P the following year with Participant group 4 (parents) and Participant group 5 (their Grade R children). The principal of School P requested another programme to be presented in his school, due to the success of the previous year's programme. The programme ran a similar course to the previous programme. Approximately four months after completion of this programme, another four parents were interviewed. The data that they provided mostly resembled that of the previous group of parents and the results were therefore combined and discussed in Chapter 6.</p> <p>The second part of Objective 4, namely assessing the effect of the programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners, was reached through the qualitative data that were collected and analysed.</p>
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<p><b>Phase 6: Dissemination</b></p> <p>Dissemination formed step 8 of phase 6 of intervention research</p>	
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<p>This phase was not formulated as an objective in the planning stage, but it forms the final phase of the intervention research process.</p>	<p>Dissemination of the research results will include the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher has already implemented the parenting programme in three other schools in the target communities as part of her work as school social worker. The researcher plans to continue implementing the programme.</li> <li>• The researcher plans to offer to share the results of the programme with the educators and Social Workers who participated in the focus groups.</li> <li>• The researcher wrote an article with some of the findings, which has been accepted for publication by an academic journal (Social Work/Maatskaplike</li> </ul>
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	<p>Werk).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The researcher is willing to share the content of the parenting programme and the results with colleagues and other interested groups as requested.</li> </ul>
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The aims and objectives of the study coincide with the main research question and the subsidiary questions. A summary is given of the aim and objectives, (see above discussion) that gives a detailed account of the way in which the researcher answered these questions:

The main research question of this study was: *What would the components be of a parenting skills programme aimed at enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners in resource poor communities?* The researcher answered this by analysing the information gathered during the literature study, comparing it to the data gathered during the focus group discussions, and identifying the components of a parenting programme, specifically aimed at enhancing school readiness in resource poor communities. The results are described in detail in Chapter 4.

The subsidiary questions were answered as follows:

- *What is the role of parenting in the school readiness of Grade R learners?* The role of parents was explored through a literature study and it was described in Chapter 2.
- *What are the problems and strengths with regards to parenting practices and school readiness in resource poor communities as identified by educators, social workers and parents in the target communities?* Three focus group discussions were conducted with the professionals and parents living and working in the communities, to gather data pertaining to this question. The data were coded and described in Chapter 3. Less data were gathered pertaining to the strengths than the weaknesses, since this study focused on addressing the problems and not the strengths.
- *What is the effect/influence of the developed parenting skills programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners in two resource poor communities?* This question was answered by conducting 13 semi-structured interviews with parents who had attended the parenting programme. All the parents indicated that they had benefited significantly from the programme and the coding of the data indicated that the parenting behaviour had improved in three important ways, namely parent-child relationship, parent-child interaction and creating a home learning environment. These behaviours contribute to school readiness. All the parents indicated that their Grade R children had improved in areas that are significant to school readiness. Although no quantitative data were obtained to confirm the effect of the parenting programme, the qualitative data strongly suggest that the

programme had a beneficial effect on the school readiness of the Grade R learners involved in the programme, thus answering the third subsidiary research question.

The researcher is satisfied that all the research questions were answered.

The central theoretical statement contained two aspects:

- If parents in resource poor communities are involved in parenting skills programmes where they engage with their children, they may be better equipped to provide a solid home environment with structure and adequate parenting to enhance their children's school readiness.
- If children can be supported by parents to master early childhood developmental tasks related to school readiness, such as confidence, curiosity, self-control, connectedness, ability to communicate and willingness to co-operate, it might contribute to better educational outcomes and more learners completing Grade 12.

The researcher is satisfied that the first part of the statement was complied with. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. The second aspect can only be complied with by longitudinal research spanning the whole school career of the participating Grade R learners. Research indicates that the parenting skills programme lays the foundation for parents to meet the requirements for the first aspect of the statement.

### **7.3.3.1 Trustworthiness**

The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Methods (Given & Saumure 2008:895) describes trustworthiness as 'the way in which qualitative researchers ensure that transferability, credibility, dependability and confirmability are evident in their research'. With this approach researchers can move beyond the rigidity of quantitative parameters, to illustrate the worth of their project. In their often-cited work (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:123-125), Lincoln and Guba (1985:207) outline the four elements of trustworthiness and how these can be achieved:

#### *Credibility*

Credibility deals with whether the findings are a true reflection of the reality that was researched (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:236; Creswell, 2013:250; Nieuwenhuis, 2016:123). Credibility was enhanced in the following ways:

- The researcher's prolonged engagement with and persistent observation of the participants and the research situation. In the first place the researcher works in the target communities and has weekly contact with educators, social workers and parents. The implementation of the parenting programme took place over a period of four months and the interviews with the 13 parents took place approximately three to five months later. By the time the semi-

structured interviews were conducted, the researcher had built up rapport with the parents and therefore they were not reluctant to talk and to share. The researcher took into account that the parents might be reluctant to share anything negative, because they might have felt obligated towards the researcher. The researcher therefore explained to the parents that criticism and suggestions were encouraged, because it would improve the programme. The researcher also stayed vigilant to perceive non-verbal cues from the parents to gauge whether they were comfortable with the data that they provided.

- A well-established research method was adopted with careful planning and clearly defined sampling and data collection methods.
- Journal notes were kept as well as frequent contact with the researcher's study leader.

### *Transferability*

Transferability is not the same as generalization, but it deals with the extent to which the results could be applied in other similar contexts (Bless, et al., 2013:237). As Joubert (2016:139) and Nieuwenhuis (2016:124) suggest, the researcher gave a detailed account of the research context, sampling, data collection and the course of the whole research process, to provide readers with the opportunity to judge whether the research could be applied to other populations.

### *Dependability*

According to Nieuwenhuis (2016:124) the concepts of credibility and dependability are related. Meticulous records of all planning, sample selection, steps in the project, changes in the planning, observations and data collected, were kept to create an audit trail (Joubert, 2016:139; Bless, et al., 2013:237), so that the study could potentially be replicated, thereby ensuring *dependability*.

### *Confirmability*

This concept refers to the possibility that other researchers will arrive at the same findings as the researcher (Joubert, 2016:139). Nieuwenhuis (2016:124) refers to Lincoln and Guba (1985) who describe confirmability as the degree of neutrality with which a researcher replicates the responses of participants to arrive at research results, and not allowing the researcher's own bias to cloud the findings. Since the researcher needed to 'immerse' herself in the research situation (Reamer, 2005:81), and because of the researcher's prolonged association with the parents and the fact that a relationship of trust had developed between them, there was a possibility of bias. However, this relationship was not as close as a one-on-one or a therapeutic relationship, and the researcher kept the possibility of bias in mind when analysing the data, which decreased the possibility of this clouding the results (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:124). To further ensure confirmability, the researcher made audio recordings of all the discussions and interviews, and had them transcribed by a transcriber who does court work, and she committed herself to confidentiality by e-mail. The data were analysed according to Braun and Clarke's (2013:178) steps of thematic analysis.

Trustworthiness was further enhanced by the following aspects:

#### *Using multiple data resources*

The researcher applied the process of crystallization as described by Ellingson (2009:2) and others (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:124) by using multiple approaches. Crystallization accepts that there is no absolute truth, but only partial and multiple perspectives that are constructed by researchers. Information from different data sources, such as the data provided by the focus groups, can be compared and, if they lead to the same conclusion, the results will be more trustworthy (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:124; Braun & Clarke, 2013:286). The researcher used her reflective journal and involved participants through informal feedback and semi-structured interviews to provide different perspectives and data from different angles. Data were obtained through interviews and focus groups. The researcher never had to contend with data that were contradictory or difficult to interpret, because the data from different sources supported one another.

#### *Avoiding generalizations*

Ellingson (2009:2) cautions researchers to refrain from making definite claims and clinging to stereotypes and preconceived ideas. Instead they should make room for participants' thoughts and opinions. The essence of qualitative research is to study and understand a situation in its uniqueness as well as the interactions within that situation (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:125). The researcher strove to avoid generalizations and stereotyping by viewing each participant as a unique person and by valuing each person's input, which contributed to the richness and variety of the data.

#### *Use quotes carefully*

Bless, *et al.* (2016:239) believe direct verbatim quotes add to the trustworthiness of a study, because they give the reader an impression of what the participants said and how the researcher interpreted it. However, it is important that researchers do not use quotes out of context or to only partially support an argument. Quotes should only be included when enough data are given to understand the context in which it was used to convey the true meaning of the participant's words (Nieuwenhuis, 2010:115). The researcher included verbatim quotes when the participants spoke in English and translations of quotes of Afrikaans speaking participants. The translations were done as accurately as possible without losing the essence of the meaning. Where there was no suitable English word, the Afrikaans word was added in brackets.

#### *Methodological verifications*

Because qualitative research is flexible, changes can take place during the research process (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:238). During this study, several changes had to be made in consultation with

the researcher's study leader. The first change was to convert the planned systematic literature study to a literature study, as explained later in this chapter. The second change was that, instead of implementing the parenting programme in two schools, it was implemented in three schools during the pilot testing. The researcher is convinced that these changes did not change the essence of the study, nor did it have an impact on the trustworthiness of the results.

#### *Ensuring data saturation*

According to Bless (2013: 239), researchers need to continue collecting data until data saturation is achieved. The researcher applied this principle in two ways. With the literature study the researcher consulted resources until the researcher gained the impression that the study was representative of the opinions and findings in literature. With regards to the interviews with the parents, the researcher interviewed parents until no new data emerged, although all the parents gave a unique account of their experience of the programme.

#### *Acknowledge the limitations of the study*

Since the qualitative research is not an exact science and the researcher is dealing with constantly changing phenomena, every study encounters limitations and unpredicted problems (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:125). Limitations encountered during the research will be discussed later in this chapter.

### **7.3.3.2 Ethical aspects**

The following ethical considerations were dealt with during the research process:

#### *Voluntary participation*

Participants of Participant group 1 were the professionals working in the target communities. The researcher had to take into account that both the social workers and educators work under pressure and no undue pressure was exercised to persuade them to participate. The researcher had to be considerate of their time. Since the researcher stood in a working relationship with both these groups, the researcher had to assure the participants that their participation or refusal to participate would not influence the researcher's professional relationship with them. The focus group with the parents of Grade 1 learners who formed part of Participant group 1, took place separately from the focus groups with educators and social workers, to ensure that the parents would not feel intimidated by the presence of professionals. The researcher explained to all three groups that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to refuse participation if they felt uneasy or distressed.

With regards to Participant groups 2 and 3, no pressure was put on any parents to participate or to continue with the programme, should they have wished otherwise. All the parents of Grade R

learners at the target schools were invited, but, although the principals and educators recommended attending, no coercion was used. At the first session, the researcher explained to the participants what the programme entailed and what voluntary participation meant. They signed the consent form, indicating that they had taken cognisance of the fact that they were under no pressure to participate. It was also explained to the participants that they were free to discontinue their attendance without the obligation to explain their decision to anyone. The researcher therefore did not contact any parents who dropped out, to find out what the reason was, or to entice them back. With the signing of the consent forms, the parents were requested to explain to their Grade R children what attending the programme entailed to obtain their assent. Participant groups 3 and 5 were 5 or 6 years old at the time and could not sign, so they gave verbal assent. It was further explained to the participants that they were free to leave the venue, should they ever feel uncomfortable or distressed. Although it never happened, the researcher would have had an interview with the participant afterwards to determine what the problem was and to take appropriate action to prevent further occurrences.

Throughout the programme the accent was on voluntary participation of both parents and their children. There were a few incidents when a Grade R learner seemed to be angry or unwilling to participate in an activity. The researcher then advised the parent to be gentle and never to force the learner to participate, but to rather distract the learners' attention, by cuddling the learner, or by going out for a while and to return when the learner felt better. During the singing and dancing, the researcher discouraged parents to force their children to participate if they were too shy, but rather to be patient until they were ready. When one parent explained to the researcher that her son did not like the snakes and ladders game, the researcher advised her to refrain from forcing him to play, but rather to focus on games that he liked.

#### *Inclusion of vulnerable population*

Working with vulnerable participants requires special considerations, and researchers need to be sensitive to their needs (Bless, et al., 2013:34). The researcher needed to justify why research in two vulnerable communities was proposed. The researcher postulated that there is little need for the parenting programme that was going to be developed in prosperous, affluent communities, because the quality of parenting in such communities is generally better and those parents have access to resources that poor people do not have, including educational facilities and programmes. Including vulnerable populations was part of the motivation for this study, as set out in detail in section 1.4.3.3. As mentioned in the problem statement, the Department of Education's White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development (2001:5) approximately 40% of children in South Africa grow up in conditions of extreme poverty and neglect, leading to an increased risk of stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, failing grades and eventually school dropout. The effect of

poverty, poor parenting and the devastating social problems in the communities where the researcher planned to conduct the research, pose a serious risk to children's social, emotional and academic development and impact negatively on school readiness. Several authors describe the distressing cumulative effect of poverty and the problems associated with poverty on the development of children (Beatty, 2013:71; Mistry, *et al.*, 2010:433; Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010: 126). However, White Paper 5 of the Department of Education (2001:3) acknowledges that the effects of early deprivation can be reversed by timely and appropriate interventions. The Department therefore made provision for the establishment of a national accredited Reception Year Programme (Grade R) for all children five years of age, to prepare them for entering Grade 1. The researcher believes that the cycle of poverty and other social problems can effectively be addressed through improving the quality of the parenting in these vulnerable communities, and by improving the children's learning opportunities.

With regards to Participant group 2 and 3, they were going to be involved in their personal capacity and there would also be a greater imbalance of authority between the researcher and the participants. The researcher had to put measures in place to counter this imbalance and to empower the participants to feel worthy and capable. The researcher strove to achieve this by

- being warm and welcoming;
- assuring the participants that participation was voluntary and that participants' decision to withdraw from the programme would in no way harm their Grade R child or their relationship with the school;
- assuring the parents that they were the best parents that their children could have and that good parenting was not dependent on money or the level of education;
- mingling with the parents and conversing with them when the opportunity arose;
- encouraging participants to make contributions, by explaining that they as parents have expert opinions, but never putting pressure on anyone to contribute;
- leaving the way open for parents to leave the programme if at any stage before or during sessions they felt uncomfortable, without giving an account to anyone;
- going out of her way to be accommodating, for example bringing a picnic blanket and baby toys for the siblings who came along to sit and play;
- sometimes sharing a joke or funny incident with the participants at the cost of the researcher, illustrating to them that she is also human.

#### *Written informed consent and assent*

Goodwill permission: The researcher approached the principals of the three focus schools with her protocol and with the written permission of the Department of Education. She explained to them the aims of the study and discussed with them the practical arrangements, as well as the need for

their support and co-operation. All three principals were positive about the research and consented to act as gatekeepers.

**Informed consent:** This means that participants base their voluntary participation on a full understanding of what the research entails and the possible risks involved. Informed consent has become increasingly important in research (Babbie, 2010:66; Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32; Du Plessis, 2016:77) and is one of the ways to command respect for participants (Thomas, 2009:9). In this research project, written informed consent was obtained from all adults in the participant groups, after explaining the content of the letter of consent to them. Different letters of consent were used for Participant group 1 (see Annexure D & E) and Participant group 2 and 4 (see Annexure F), as well as for the parents with whom semi-structured interviews were conducted (see Annexure G).

Assent is usually obtained from children aged 7 and older. The age of the Grade R learners in Participant group 3 was between 5 and 6 years, which is the age of most Grade R learners. However, their active agreement needed to be obtained. Since they were too young to sign documents, the researcher asked the parents to explain the procedure to the learners in simple terms so that they would understand the implications as far as possible. The children were made aware that they were allowed to ask questions, that they could refuse without providing a reason, and that they would be allowed to withdraw at any time (Schenk & Williamson, 2005:42).

### *Confidentiality*

Confidentiality included anonymity and protecting the identity of the participants, including withholding the names of participants, schools or communities or any other identifying details (Du Plessis, 2016:72; Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32), and it is a principle that needs to be applied throughout the research until report writing (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32). The parenting programme was presented on the premises of the focus schools in a venue that was large enough to accommodate both Participant groups 2 and 3. The programme was presented in open groups, which made anonymity impossible. It was explained to the participants that total confidentiality in such groups is impossible and that it would not be expected of them to share any sensitive information. However, the researcher endeavoured to ensure confidentiality by applying the following measures:

- Although the participants of Participant group 1 were not involved in their personal capacity, they might nevertheless have felt that the information that they were requested to divulge, was of a sensitive nature. The researcher assured them that no names of professionals or organisations would be mentioned in the report and that they were free to only share information that they felt comfortable with.
- Confidentiality during the presentation of the parenting skills programme to Participant groups 2, 3, 4 and 5 was encouraged, by explaining to participants that no names,

addresses or identifying details of individuals or communities would be repeated by the researcher outside of the programme. The researcher undertook to anonymise the audio recordings before transcription and the transcriber was also bound by confidentiality. The researcher undertook not to discuss anything that was said in the group with the educators of the Grade R learners or with any other school officials. Since it was a parenting group and not therapeutic sessions, no highly confidential or reportable information was disclosed. The researcher nevertheless encouraged participants to treat personal information that was shared by other participants with confidentiality.

- The semi-structured interviews with the parents of Participant group 2 and 4 took place behind closed doors.
- The researcher took care that the final report contained no details that would reveal the identity of individuals, their schools or their community as suggested by Reamer (2005:40).

#### *Data storage and archive*

The researcher transcribed the data and, for the duration of the research, stored it on a password protected computer to which only the researcher and the researcher's study leader had access. The audio recordings of sessions were stored in the same way and they were only used by the researcher for data analysis purposes. After completion of the research, recorded data will be stored for 5 years in a safe at the offices of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies in Wellington. The researcher will hand the recorded data over to the study leader at the latest 10 days before graduation, and the study leader will take it to the line manager at the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies in Wellington. Only the line manager of the Centre will have access to the safe and she will take responsibility to destroy the data after the prescribed 5 years, calculated from the graduation date of the student. She has a system of recordkeeping with a reminder of the date when the data will be destroyed.

#### *Direct and indirect risks and benefits*

Human research should always guard against harming people, regardless of whether they participate voluntarily (Babbie, 2010:65; Du Plessis, 2016:77). In SA with its scarcity of resources, the necessity of research needs to be studied before it is undertaken. The aim of any research should never be the senseless acquisition of knowledge, but it should always be for the benefits of individuals or communities (Du Plessis, 2016:76). The researcher elucidated in detail not only the necessity, but also the urgency of the proposed study. The primary aim of this research project was that the programme had to be of considerable benefit to the participants, by enhancing the school readiness of the Grade R learners, through improving the quality of support and care that they will receive from their parents. The anticipated enhanced school readiness would impact positively on the development of the children and ultimately on all the areas of their lives. This would indirectly benefit the communities in which they live, as well as the economy of the country

in the long-term. School readiness is not only viewed as an important stepping stone in ensuring good educational outcomes for individual learners, but it has implications on a much wider scale. On a macro level, preparing children to excel academically, is one of the most cost-effective ways of reducing poverty and stimulating the economic growth and prosperity of a nation (UNICEF, 2012:3; Young & Richardson, 2007:9-10).

No serious risk to any participants was foreseen. Although gangsterism was rife in the target communities, the parenting programme was presented to Participant groups 2 and 3 at schools that are not in the line of fire of regular gang fights. The participating children participated in the activities and games together with their parents and they were in the care of the parents all the time. The researcher was never physically involved with them. There was also no risk of stigmatization, because this was a programme that all parents were free to participate in and therefore participation did not indicate problems. Nevertheless, the researcher was constantly aware of the 'no risk' principle and did not present activities that could be harmful. When the activity was face paint, the researcher bought face paint from a reputable dealer to ensure a good quality. The researcher also provided lotion for parents who preferred to remove the face paint quickly, as well as finger paint for parents and learners who preferred not to use the face paint.

#### *Conflict of interests*

According to Reamer (2005:41), researchers should guard against exposing participants to undue stress and discomfort to achieve their research aims. The researcher guarded against ever putting the interests of the research project above the well-being of the participants. To avoid further conflict of interest, the researcher did not include clients as participants. On three occasions participating parents approached the researcher for assistance, but the researcher referred them to the welfare organization that rendered services in that community.

#### *Feedback of results*

When giving feedback on results, researchers need to be accurate and honest and never try to conceal unfavourable findings (Du Plessis, 2016:77; Reamer, 2005:41). Because the researcher was personally involved in the research process, the researcher had the responsibility to acknowledge that her own values and bias might impact her observations, and in analysing the data this possibility was kept in mind (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:125). Through keeping a reflective journal, the researcher could examine herself and be aware of bias and prejudice. The researcher realized that, although she works almost exclusively with clients with problems, many parents attending the programme were 'normal' community members who did not attend because of social problems. The researcher discovered that these parents were talented in their own way and they could contribute meaningfully to the programme. One incident stands out. During one session the researcher noticed a 'new' parent. Later the researcher realized that this parent had removed her

front teeth and was wearing a woolen cap, which made her unrecognisable. Later it emerged that this parent was a gifted artist. Furthermore, the researcher had to guard against preconceived opinions of parents, such as judging them by their appearances to be substance abusers.

#### *Remuneration and cost*

Participants were not remunerated for participating. The programme at school R was presented at a time of day when the parents came to school to fetch their children and therefore there were no additional travelling costs for them. The parents of the Saturday groups had to travel to the schools at their own cost. That might also have been a factor for some parents dropping from the programme. Light refreshments were served at each session at the researcher's expense.

The researcher is satisfied that she acted in an ethical manner throughout the research and that high ethical standards were upheld.

## **7.4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS**

To summarise the research and draw meaningful conclusions, the chapters will be discussed separately.

### **7.4.1 Chapter 1**

The researcher became aware of a serious problem that South Africa has to contend with, namely the poor retention of learners in the formal school system, and the low number of learners, who start Grade 1 and who eventually complete Grade 12 successfully. Contributing to this problem is the lack of school readiness in learners who enter the school system, and the apparent inability of schools to assist these learners to catch up with their peers. The researcher's own experience in the field of her work as a social worker in schools, as well as the preliminary literature study, revealed the importance of school readiness, and the fact that most children entering the formal school system who are not ready for school, do not ever catch up. The result is that such children fall behind in their school work and eventually drop out of school. The future of such children is bleak. Not only do they not have marketable skills for the labour market to be self-sustaining, but they do not contribute to a country's economy and they perpetuate the intergenerational cycle of poverty. School readiness has caught attention worldwide as a prominent tool to combat poverty. According to literature, it is profitable for a country to yearly invest in childhood development.

Further study by the researcher revealed that parents, as key role players in children's immediate environment, play a vital role in early childhood development and as such, need to be involved in any intervention to enhance school readiness. The above information convinced the researcher of

the importance of parenting programmes to equip parents to develop parenting behaviours conducive to the school readiness of their children.

After consultation with the researcher's study leader, it was decided that the appropriate research design was the Design and Development (D&D) model of intervention research as pioneered by Rothman and Thomas (1994:31-33), and which is still being used as a framework for research (De Vos & Strydom, 2011:480; Fraser & Galinsky, 2010:468; Gilgun & Sands, 2012:350). This design formed the ideal guideline for the development and implementation of the parenting programme. D&D was a suitable vehicle for qualitative research and fitted into the philosophical paradigm of social constructivism.

#### **7.4.2 Chapter 2**

The second chapter contains the literature study about the role of parents in the school readiness of Grade R learners. This formed the ideal theoretical framework for the rest of the study. There is a wealth of research done on school readiness and parenting, probably indicating the seriousness of the issue. The researcher found it stimulating to research across different disciplines and to gain insight into the research done by other professionals, including education, psychology and health practitioners. The literature study covered a wide study field and describes the concept of school readiness as well as the parents' role in the development of school readiness.

As with the preliminary investigation, the researcher was again confronted with the importance of school readiness as a global, as well as South African issue, not only for children's individual benefit and future, but also for economic reasons. The researcher became aware of the extent of the damage caused by poverty in South Africa, to the development of young children as well as the crisis in which the school system finds itself. The fact that poverty often robs parents of the ability to be confident and proficient parents, and the effect of the problems accompanying poverty, such as harsh parenting and lack of stimulation and resources brought to the researcher's attention the necessity to present a parenting programme specifically for resource poor communities.

Included in the literature study is a description of school readiness. This part of the study includes two professional domains, namely education and psychology. The researcher had to familiarize herself with study material that is not normally part of social work, but the researcher noted how these fields overlap and 'join hands', especially when parents became involved. Although some of the domains of school readiness are not usually regarded as part of the social work field, it was important that the researcher gained an overview of all the domains that influence parents while their children are still almost exclusively in their care. It is also important to note that early childhood development starts before birth and impacts significantly on later development.

Therefore, the researcher realized that, when studying school readiness, child development since birth needs to be considered. The literature study also brought to the researcher's attention the importance of parents in the development of their children.

School readiness is described in the literature study as a multi-faceted concept that includes social and emotional domains that were not formerly regarded as significant. The researcher regarded the statement of one researcher quite significant, namely that educators can still teach learners to read and write, but they are not equipped to teach learners to be socially and emotionally school ready. This opinion is shared with many other researchers. The researcher described all the domains of school readiness and the role that parents play in each domain. This gave a broad overview of school readiness and helped the researcher to plan the activities for the parenting programme.

The developmental theories of child development formed the ideal framework against which early childhood development leading to school readiness, and its correlation with influences in the child's ecosystem, which included parents, could be studied. Several of the developmental theories, including Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory, Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development and Bandura's social learning theory, emphasise that parents play a vital role in children's development. Through the literature study the researcher familiarised herself with terms and concepts that are strictly speaking outside the field of social work, but that are actually an integral part of their work, such as proprioceptive development or self-regulation.

A comprehensive literature study formed an essential part of the research process and the researcher returned to it during various phases of the research process. The conclusion that the literature study brought the researcher to is, that parents play an indispensable role in the development of children from birth to school readiness, and that parents need to be included in any interventions that aim to enhance school readiness.

### **7.4.3 Chapter 3**

This chapter deals with data captured from the three focus group discussions, to determine the concepts of school readiness and parenting in the target communities, as viewed by professionals and parents living and working in the communities. This step formed part of the second phase of the D&D intervention research. Acknowledging the constraints of time and work pressure of the participants, the researcher believes that the maximum data were collected within the minimum space of time. The fact that so few parents turned up for the focus group, is typical of the resource poor community where some parents do not take commitments to school matters seriously, and others are detained by circumstances such as a lack of transport or a sudden work opportunity.

Nevertheless, the parents who turned up, provided data that correspond with that of the professional participants.

The framework of qualitative research with the philosophical paradigm of a social constructivism was ideal during this phase of research, and it allowed the researcher to capture in-depth and rich data that were experienced by the participants. It allowed the researcher to enter the world of the participants and gain their unique and varied perspectives of the issues and experiences that were discussed. The strengths of some parents as described by the participants, persuaded the researcher to use a strengths based approach in the parenting programme. The problems that the participants described in detail of school readiness and parenting, correspond remarkably with the problems associated with poverty, as found in literature. The researcher had to consciously take a social constructivist stance to refrain from being critical, and she realised that some of the problems associated with poverty probably originate from ignorance or from a need to survive. The researcher postulated that many people living with socio-economic challenges, might feel trapped in their situations and they might have high aspirations for their children to escape from the circumstances through education.

The data were coded, as suggested in literature, and themes provided by the three groups emerged from the data. The coded data occupy 48 pages and are too large to include in the annexures. No contradictory information was provided, which created the impression that the data are reliable and usable. The problems as uncovered by the focus group discussions, included a serious lack of school readiness amongst the Grade 1 learners, of whom some are possibly affected by prenatal exposure to substances causing brain damage. Problems associated with the parents included poor parent-child relationships, parental substance abuse, family violence, and various forms of child abuse, especially neglect, harsh discipline and a lack of cognitive stimulation of their children. Problems encountered with children included behaviour problems, early school drop-out, substance abuse and teenage pregnancy. Serious problems in the communities including gangsterism and violence, were also mentioned.

The data were analysed with literature control that validated what the participants had shared. The coded data formed an indispensable background against which the researcher could develop the parenting programme. Without the input of the participants, a program might not have been successfully developed for those communities.

#### **7.4.4 Chapter 4**

This chapter contains a description of the design and development phase of the intervention research. This phase also answers the research question of what the components are of a parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor

communities. To identify what these components should be, the researcher turned to the literature study to determine what the role of parenting is in school readiness and she took this as the ideal. The researcher then compared this to the problems with parenting as identified by the focus groups. The comparison revealed the deficits in parenting that needed to be addressed by the parenting programme. This comparison is included in the annexures (see annexure H).

Three components were identified, namely the parent-child relationship, social and emotional development and resilience. The researcher then identified specific topics that would address these components and they helped to determine the twelve sessions of the programme. The principles guiding the programme are discussed. The researcher made some decisions in this process that contributed much to the success of the programme, namely the decision to engage the learners and parents together in the programme and to focus on building resilience. Other aspects included a strength based approach, focusing on the parental role, and trying not to make educators of the parents, as well as parent wellness. The success of these principles is discussed in Chapter 6.

The next discussion is about the components of the parenting programme together with the topics addressing the components. The rationale for each component and topic is explained. This process directed the researcher to think analytically which contributed to the scientific nature of the process of design and development.

Chapter 4 formed the base of the parenting programme and the researcher is convinced that the research question was addressed adequately, as discussed earlier in this chapter. The researcher decided on 12 topics, because this programme is designed to be used by social workers in schools as well as NGOs. This is approximately the maximum number of sessions that social workers who work under pressure will be able to present. There are several more topics that would fit into the framework of the components, for example building trust, problem solving or positive communication. These topics were addressed in the sessions, but they were not treated as separate topics. However, the researcher had to remind herself that this programme is not a general parenting programme, but it is directed towards enhancing school readiness, and that school readiness issues had to be addressed. In conclusion, the design and development of the parenting programme was an exciting process and it fulfilled the aim for which it was designed. The evaluation of the programme by the participating parents is discussed in Chapter 6.

#### **7.4.5 Chapter 5**

This chapter contains a description of the implementation of the programme in the target schools as well as the content of the twelve sessions. The decision to implement the programme in three schools instead of in two schools, yielded results and added to the substantial number of parents

who completed the programme, in spite of parents who dropped out. The programme was then repeated the following year in School P, where another group of parents attended regularly. This brings the total number of parents who completed the programme to 42, which the researcher regards as a sufficient number to assess the results of the programme. The researcher found that it is advantageous to present the programme in schools where there is good management and structure. It seems as if parents in those schools are more committed to parenting and the education of their children. In School N, only one parent attended all the sessions and only four parents attended eight or more sessions. In School P and R, the attendance was more positive.

As envisaged, each session contained a variety of activities that supported the topic (where possible) and it covered all the domains of school readiness, including fine and gross motor development and pre-literacy and numeracy development. The researcher utilized many activities that she obtained from her colleagues in related disciplines, such as curriculum and learning support. The activities provided ample opportunity for interaction between parents and their Grade R children, which was one of the main objectives of the programme. It also provided parents with an idea on how to further stimulate their children at home. The researcher perceived that it was the concrete activities and exercises that persuaded many parents to stay in the programme. The researcher postulates that the reason for this perception is, that not all the parents are interested in a lecture that is not connected to what 'real life' constitutes for them. They want something concrete and in hand to take home. The researcher also perceived that many parents needed the fun and relaxation that accompanied the activities. Parents often coloured in the pictures with their children and some of them sang and danced to the music with more enthusiasm than their children.

Some of the parents were overly concerned that the product that their children made, should be of a high standard and the researcher often had to caution them that it was their children's own handiwork, and that the process was more important than the end result. The researcher was actually relieved when the end results were that of a Grade R standard and not something that the parents made. This points out the importance for parents to be realistic about their children's abilities and to be patient with them.

With regards to practical arrangements, the researcher found that a school hall is the ideal venue for the presentation of the programme, especially with kitchen and toilet facilities nearby. It offers ample space and does not contain distractions. A classroom with toys and print rich walls is not conducive to the concentration of Grade R's, and it causes stress when parents need to contain their children all the time in a venue where someone else's property needs to be respected. The ideal size of a group is 15 – 20 parents with their children, when a social worker presents the programme alone without a sound system. Sometimes two parents or siblings also come along,

which makes the group even larger. When a group is larger, noise becomes a factor, because Grade R's and even parents are not quiet and attentive all the time. Preparations and information packs need to be prepared and ready beforehand, otherwise participants become restless. Information packs need to contain colouring pages to keep the Grade R's busy while the parents are being addressed.

The researcher is convinced that the implementation of the parenting programme was a success and she learnt as the programme progressed. All the topics described in Chapter 4 (see section 4.3) and the Chapter 5 were relevant to school readiness. The first four topics, namely the five love languages, building a child's self-esteem, positive discipline and teaching children to deal with feelings, are topics relevant to parenting of children of all ages. The other eight topics can be adapted to suit a specific population of parents and other objectives. The programme did not focus on parents who are illiterate and it was assumed that parents could read the stories to their children and that they could also understand the other hand-outs. In the case of a parent population that might include illiterate participants, the programme content might have to be adapted to accommodate them. Some of the topics, including the development of self-control and social development, could also be simplified to include only one important aspect, such as routine or teaching children to interact with other children. Rather teach parents one solid idea that they could remember, than a lot of theory that is lost to them. Overall the researcher feels that this programme was suitable for these target communities that were used, and it can be repeated with success in similar communities.

#### **7.4.6 Chapter 6**

Chapter 6 contains an analysis of the data obtained through the thirteen semi-structures interviews with participating parents. This formed phase five of the intervention research: evaluation and advanced development. Nine interviews were conducted after the implementation of the prototype and four interviews were conducted after further development of the programme. Amendments to the prototype were minor and did not alter the content of the programme significantly. Therefore, the data gathered through the interviews are presented together. The researcher was struck by how similar the participants' responses were pertaining to the programme, but also how unique each participant's account was of how he/she experienced the programme and how he/she applied it to his/her situation. The value of a social constructivist approach is seen in the data that was obtained. This approach allowed the researcher to get an overview of the participants' unique situations and to capture the rich and in-depth significance that they attach to their experience.

A summary of the important data that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with the parents:

A parenting programme for Grade R parents can be a success, and it makes a difference in the way that parents stimulate and parent their children. All the participating parents expressed the awareness that they have a role to play in their children's development and school readiness. Judging from the parents' accounts, significant advances were made in three areas of parenting that play a decisive role in enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners: the parent-child relationship, parent-child interaction and creating a home learning environment. The researcher postulated that, if a programme succeeds in improving these areas of parenting skills, the programme can be deemed to have reached an important goal.

Inclusion of the Grade R children in the programme was also a strong feature and probably played a decisive role in building parent-child interaction and relationships. Numerous accounts by the parents suggest that the positive interaction with their children was a novel experience for some parents and it contributed to a closer (or new) bond with their children.

The programme offered a variety of activities to teach parents to interact with their Grade R children and cover several domains of school readiness. The researcher believes the cheerful effect that the music, art, humour, games and activities had on the parents and children, benefited the parent-child bond and tied the parents to the programme.

The researcher's effort to nurture the parents and acknowledge them as important people in their own right, seems to have been a positive feature. The participating parents expressed great appreciation for the opportunity to network with other parents as well as the benefit that the self-care session had for themselves. As one parent mentioned, if a parent feels good about herself, it passes on to the child. Parental care should ideally be kept in mind when a parenting programme is developed.

With regards to the success of the 12 sessions, the parents' responses varied. They remembered and appreciated topics and activities that were concrete or familiar to their world. The researcher became aware of the importance of offering many and varied activities in such a programme, to retain the attention of parents and learners and to offer them the opportunity for pleasant interaction.

The parents' responses pertaining to the sessions were as follows (discussed in the sequence in which the sessions were presented):

**Session 1:** Five love languages: For some parents the content of the first session about the five love languages and the interaction with their children, persuaded them to continue with the programme. Unfortunately, the opinion of the parents who dropped out after the first session could

not be obtained. The researcher postulates that, for parents who have insecure attachments and are not used to physical intimacy, the first session with its bonding activities might have been too intense. In further implementation of the programme it might be considered to start with a more 'neutral' topic, such as discipline or self-esteem.

**Session 2:** Building my child's self-esteem: This topic attracted positive responses and the impression was gained that, not only did the parents become aware of the importance of building their children's self-esteem, but it was also an important lesson for some parents personally. The brag bag activity was a success. In future, presenters of the programme can repeat the 'positive message' idea in further sessions, and hand out more cardboard shapes for parents to write positive messages to add to those in the brag bag. This will serve to establish with the parents the awareness of giving through positive messages.

**Session 3:** Positive discipline: This is a burning issue identified in the literature study and it was also mentioned by the focus groups. The researcher's own work experience confirms that many parents in the target communities apply harsh punishment for lack of a better alternative, with dire consequences for the child's behaviour in school. The parenting programme seemed to have given positive alternatives to the participants. This is an important topic that should be retained in all parenting groups, whether for school readiness or not. It could even be expanded to two or more sessions with parents of older learners.

**Session 4:** Helping my child to deal with feelings: According to the responses of the majority of the parents, this session yielded positive results and the feelings chart also provided a practical way to connect with their children's feelings. Several parents could also confirm that they discussed their own hurt feelings with their children, which could contribute to the development of empathy for others by the Grade R learners. Emotion regulation is not only vital for school readiness, it is highly important for all people to live balanced, normal lives and it is easier coaching young children than older ones. This topic should be covered in any parenting programme.

**Session 5:** Self-control and delayed gratification: Some of the parents could not remember the topic, but they remembered the robot and stop/freeze activity as well as the discussion about the importance of a fixed routine. Several parents could relate well to the topic and could share how they are teaching their children certain principles of self-control, which will contribute to school readiness. Depending on the character of a target group of parents, this topic could be simplified, although it is an important concept for school readiness.

**Session 6:** Social development: This topic covered a variety of important aspects of social development with many tips for parents. The activities were easy and fun to participate in. During the feedback most of the parents could not remember much detail except concrete aspects, such as the need for their Grade R children to learn to get along with other children and to build friendships. Social development is such a vital component of school readiness that it needs to be retained, but it could be simplified or divided into two sessions.

**Session 7:** Identity development. This was once again a term that was not familiar to the parents, but they thoroughly enjoyed the activity of filling in the outline of a person with their children. Identity development is a process that continues into adolescence, but if the parents can be made aware of the importance of establishing a feeling of belonging, resembling relatives but still maintaining uniqueness, it will contribute to school readiness and lay a sure foundation for the process later on. The activity spanned two sessions.

**Session 8:** How to convey values to my child: Moral development is a vital part of young children's development and a preparation to enter the formal school system. Living in homes and communities where children are exposed to contradicting values, requires that parents be made aware that they have an influence and that they need to deal decisively with their children's moral development. Although only six parents could respond that they apply the teaching of the session, this session or a simplified version, should be included in a parenting programme for Grade R parents as well as other parents.

**Session 9:** The role of play in the development of school readiness: This session was straight forward and successful and all the parents confirmed that their children have opportunities to play. The suggestions to parents of possible games were practical and accessible. Several parents also confirmed that they play with their children and parents mentioned games such as hopscotch, as memorable activities. This topic is specifically aimed at school readiness and could be replaced by another topic with older children.

**Session 10:** Teaching my child to think positively: This was another of the topics to build resilience and, judging from the parents' comments, it seems as if this was a valuable teaching for them personally and for their interaction with their Grade R children. Even though the concept of positive thinking may be somewhat advanced for Grade R's, there were parents who could confirm that their children apply positive thinking. The important lesson was that parents and Grade R's have the choice. This topic complements the topic of self-talk that was part of parent wellness. Thinking positively is a skill for all age groups, especially for parents and learners living in socio-economic challenging circumstances.

**Session 11:** Humour and fun: This topic was presented after the rather serious previous topic and was the last topic before the school holiday. It was part of the sessions to build resilience. The activities definitely contributed to the positive, fun-filled atmosphere in the parenting group and it was a suitable session to motivate the parents to return after the rather long Easter break.

**Session 12:** Parent wellness: The importance of this session emerged from the parents' responses and highlighted the urgent need for parents, who parent in challenging circumstances, to be nurtured and to be supported emotionally. The researcher believes that this session builds trust between a presenter and participating parent, and can be successfully included in different forms in any parenting programme.

The participants were uniform in their appreciation of the programme and the value that it added to the development of their Grade R children towards school readiness. The researcher is convinced that the parenting programme fulfilled the aim and objectives set out in Chapter 1, and that the intervention research was the appropriate research design. From a qualitative perspective, the results are encouraging and reveal a strong improvement in all three significant areas of parenting.

## **7.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There were several limitations to this study:

### **7.5.1 Focus group discussion with parents**

Only four parents turned up for the focus group discussion, of which one parent dominated the discussion. The other parents might have been somewhat intimidated by her, since she was a volunteer at the school. The fact that the data provided by the parents corresponded closely with that provided by the professionals in the communities, made the option to repeat the focus group with another group of parents, redundant.

### **7.5.2 Parent attendance**

In the researcher's line of work, the researcher encounters learners who come from extremely deprived social-economic home circumstances and who are not school ready when they enter the school system. This parenting programme was in the first place intended for the parents of these children. These parents need such a programme most, and they are in the least position to access support through their own means. However, consistent with what the researcher and her colleagues have experienced, these parents did not turn up for the parenting programme. The impression was gained that the concerned and informed parents who care about their children, attended the programme. A strategy still has to be found to persuade the parents mentioned above to attend. The problem of the parents' accessing of available resources, was discussed in

Chapter 5, as also described by Berlin, Whiteside-Mansell, Roggman, Green, Robinson and Spieker (2011:61).

### **7.5.3 Limited resources**

Literature describes many research projects that are funded to provide incentives to participants, such as transport money, food parcels or resources to use at home (Benzies, *et al.*, 2014:204; Mathis & Bierman, 2015:607). The researcher had no access to funds and, although she was allowed to use stationary and copying facilities at work, she still had to purchase many resources as well as all the refreshments herself. The researcher also had no incentive such as taxi fare to offer to parents who might otherwise have attended. It might be mentioned in consent forms for similar research that, although. In future, research funds for parent transport might contribute to improved attendance. The consent forms might then contain the following wording: ‘...there will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study. Transport can be arranged should you need it in which case you will need to sign an indemnity form’.

### **7.5.4 Parent retention**

Participant retention was a problem. In the target communities failing to attend or coming late are common occurrences at all school meetings and activities. The researcher noticed that attendance was better at the better managed target schools than at the poorly managed target school. It is postulated that the attitude of the school management and the structure and ambiance of caring in a school, play a role in the seriousness with which parents regard school activities and programmes. This is a pity, because it is sometimes the very parents and learners at these underperforming schools who need such a programme most.

## **7.6 RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the findings of this research, the researcher wishes to make the following recommendations:

### **7.6.1 Promoting early childhood development and school readiness**

School readiness appears to be an issue of such importance for individuals as well as for South Africa’s economy and general prosperity, that it is imperative to make provision for funds for extensive programmes to promote early childhood development and school readiness. The widespread poverty in South Africa demands that programmes and resources be allocated to enhance early childhood development and school readiness. This can be done in the following ways:

7.6.1.1 The provisions in the White Paper on Families (2013) and the mandate given to social workers in the Children's Act (2005), need to be utilized to do early intervention with families, and innovative ways need to be developed to reach vulnerable families before they become part of the welfare system out of necessity. It is easier and more cost effective to focus on early prevention than to try and 'fix' a situation later on (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011). The benefits in terms of economic and human capital of investing in early childhood development far outweigh the cost (Heckman, 2012:50).

7.6.1.2 Programmes to strengthen family life and enhance parenting skills, need to be normalized and divorced from the stigma of being 'welfare clients' and they need to be accessible in all communities. Proper funding will enable social workers to present well developed programmes as well as offer incentives for attending.

7.6.1.3 Parenting programmes need to address the fundamental emotional needs of children that parents are most suited to fulfil. The need for a nurturing, supportive parent-child relationship, especially in socio-economic adversity, was mentioned time and again in literature. Parenting programmes should ideally contain activities that are aimed at parents in conveying the skills of building a relationship and of interacting with their children.

7.6.1.4 In the context of school readiness the importance of creating a home learning environment for children, was also accentuated. All parenting programmes aimed at improving early childhood development, need to address this important aspect. Parents can be supported to use what their environment offers to stimulate their children without having to buy expensive resources. The researcher is aware of the fact that the researcher's colleagues in learning support, do parenting groups where they teach parents these skills. However, social workers have access to many more parents who are not accessible in the formal school system, and these activities can be used as good parenting in any parenting programme. Furthermore, the focus of social workers could be on enhancing the social and emotional development of preschoolers in the first place.

7.6.1.5 Awareness programmes, targeting the parents of babies from the time of birth and presented in facilities such as community clinics and maternity hospitals, will create awareness with parents of the role they play in their children's early development and the developmental milestones that need to be reached. For the purposes of illiterate parents, these awareness programmes can be in the form of non-verbal teaching materials. This will address the fact that child development from the time of birth, plays a role in school readiness.

7.6.1.6 With regards to the researcher's parenting programme, there are many implementation possibilities. The sequence of sessions can be changed to suit the needs of specific groups.

Although the researcher recommends that the activities be retained, the content of the topic handouts can be simplified to include fewer elements, or the focus could be on only one concept. The programme can also be developed to be more accessible to parents who are illiterate. In the case of indigenous cultures, some aspects, such as acceptable social norms, need to be adapted to the specific culture of a target population (see communication under section 5.6.6).

7.6.1.7 The possible detrimental effect of methamphetamine (TIK) on school readiness, was mentioned by the educators in the focus group. Since the abuse of TIK is a fairly new phenomenon and there is a new wave of TIK-affected learners entering the formal school system, the effect of TIK on the early development and school readiness could be investigated, as well as possible interventions that could be put in place to support these learners and their educators.

### **7.6.2 Harsh punishment**

In the light of the controversy regarding parental corporal punishment and the literature indicating that harsh punishment is an aspect of parenting that could have a serious impact on school readiness, research on the prevalence of harsh punishment in the target communities or other vulnerable communities, could be undertaken. This can be undertaken on a master's degree level culminating in a doctorate, if it is followed up with a longitudinal research on the effect of intervention on such parenting behaviour.

### **7.6.3 Further research and policy development**

The extent of the crisis in basic and higher education, poverty and continuous inequality in South Africa, demands serious multi-disciplinary cooperation to do research and policy development on a large scale, to address deficits in early childhood development, leading to school readiness. Strategic and operational planning needs to take place on both national and local levels and it should be supported by legislation. The importance of parenting in the development of school readiness as well as the urgency to develop new and innovative ways to address the quality of parenting in resource poor communities, emerged from this study. University curricula need to be adapted to equip social workers in schools and in communities, to work intensively with parents in practical ways. Cooperation from other disciplines, including education, health and occupational therapy, needs to be encouraged, because in a crisis of this magnitude, there is no room for professional possessiveness. Services need to be properly funded and community based, and accessible to parents without the accompanying stigmatization of being a social work client.

## 7.7 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this study was to use intervention research to develop a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities. Education is a powerful tool to combat poverty and eradicate inequalities, but this tool is rendered less effective when learners enter the formal school system without the necessary school readiness, since schools are not equipped to support academic disadvantaged learners or to let these children catch up.

School readiness as a multi-dimensional concept, that includes cognitive development as well as social and emotional domains, has been effectively researched and documented. The interrelatedness of these domains, as well as the vitally important role that parents play in the development of school readiness, emerged from the literature study. The importance of children's development from birth and the impact that this has on all domains of their functioning, is also described in research. The parents as key role players in children's microsystem, are a determining factor in this development and they need to be actively involved in any efforts to promote early childhood development and school readiness.

Mouton (2001:137) describes the concept of a 'three worlds' framework', where real, everyday life and scientific research meet. The first world refers to the everyday home-, work- and community life of people who live and learn to survive through the lay knowledge acquired by learning and experience. This first world represents real life and real problems as described in the target communities. The second world, as described by Mouton (2001:138) is the intervention research that brought the first world into the scientific realm. The researcher could scientifically analyse the situation, develop and implement an intervention programme, and scientifically assess the effect the results. This is the significant characteristic of qualitative research, since it allows the researcher to achieve such a goal.

The research results point to the fact that there are parents living in challenging socio-economic circumstances who are willing and able to change and grow. This is an important finding and supports the recommendation above, that parenting programmes need to be extensively implemented in communities where there is such a need. The model of intervention research delivered positive results, and the parenting skills programme will hopefully make a significant contribution to the tools that are available to social workers in schools and communities. Further refining of the programme and adaptation to different target communities is encouraged.

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## ANNEXURES

### ANNEXURE A



Directorate: Research

[Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za](mailto:Audrey.wyngaard@westerncape.gov.za)

tel: +27 021 467 9272

Fax: 0865902282

Private Bag x9114, Cape Town, 8000

wced.wcape.gov.za

**REFERENCE:** 20141205-41234

**ENQUIRIES:** Dr A T Wyngaard

Mrs Jeanne Brown  
36 Ray Close  
Eversdal  
7550

**Dear Mrs Jeanne Brown**

**RESEARCH PROPOSAL: DEVELOPING A PARENTING PROGRAMME TO ENHANCE THE SCHOOL READINESS OF GRADE R LEARNERS IN RESOURCE POOR COMMUNITIES**

Your application to conduct the above-mentioned research in schools in the Western Cape has been approved subject to the following conditions:

1. Principals, educators and learners are under no obligation to assist you in your investigation.
2. Principals, educators, learners and schools should not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation.
3. You make all the arrangements concerning your investigation.
4. Educators' programmes are not to be interrupted.
5. The Study is to be conducted from **21 January 2015 till 30 September 2016**
6. No research can be conducted during the fourth term as schools are preparing and finalizing syllabi for examinations (October to December).
7. Should you wish to extend the period of your survey, please contact Dr A.T Wyngaard at the contact numbers above quoting the reference number?
8. A photocopy of this letter is submitted to the principal where the intended research is to be conducted.
9. Your research will be limited to the list of schools as forwarded to the Western Cape Education Department.
10. A brief summary of the content, findings and recommendations is provided to the Director: Research Services.
11. The Department receives a copy of the completed report/dissertation/thesis addressed to:

**The Director: Research Services**

**Western Cape Education Department**

**Private Bag X9114  
CAPE TOWN  
8000**

We wish you success in your research.

Kind regards.

Signed: Dr Audrey T Wyngaard

**Directorate: Research**

**DATE: 05 December 2014**

## **ANNEXURE B**

### **Interview schedule for the focus groups**

Welcoming by the researcher and short description of the aim of the group

Please introduce yourself and share with us how long you have been working in this community (educators and social workers)

Please introduce yourself and share with us how long you have been living in this community (parents)

#### **Educators:**

What do you understand under the term school readiness?

What are the main elements of school readiness according to your experience?

How often do you encounter learners who are not school ready?

How important is school readiness when learners go to Grade 1?

What are the problems/consequences when learners enter Grade 1 without being school ready?

What are the consequences when children fail to progress academically?

Do parents play a role in the school readiness of their children?

What can be done to enhance school readiness?

#### **Social workers:**

Do you work with parents in the community?

What are the strengths of the parents in these communities?

Describe the kind of parenting problems that you encounter

What is the effect of these problems on the development of the children?

What is the effect on the community?

What do you think can be done to improve parenting skills?

Do you find that parents are sometimes not willing to become involved in interventions?

What do you/ what can one do to motivate parents to attend programmes and interventions?

**Parents:**

How did you experience having a child in Grade R?

Did anybody share with you what is required for your child to become school ready?

What kind of advice did you receive to help your child to become school ready?

What are the demands on children in Grade R?

What are the kinds of problems that children in Grade R experience?

What is the influence of parenting on children's school readiness?

What are the things that parents in this community do well?

What are the problems with parenting that you see in the community?

What can be done to improve school readiness?

What can be done to improve parenting?

How can parents be motivated to participate in projects and specifically in this study?

**ANNEXURE C**

**Letterhead of school**

**Invitation to participate in research in ..... Primary School**

Dear Parent,

Jeanne Brown, who is the school's social worker from our district office, has been granted permission by the Education Department and by the governing body of our school to do research in our school. For this research she is developing a parenting skills programme to improve the school readiness of Grade R learners. She will present this programme to the parents of Grade R learners and to the learners themselves.

As the parent of a Grade R learner, you are hereby invited to take part in the research. The programme will be presented once a week on the school grounds for 12 weeks. The school supports this research and would like to encourage you to participate, because it could be of much benefit to your child.

If you are interested in participating, please be at the school on (date) at (time).

Kind regards,

.....

Principal

.....

Date



## **Developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners**

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT: FOCUS GROUP:

SOCIAL WORKER AND EDUCATORS

*I am a Social Work student from the North-West University doing research about the influence of parents on the school readiness of Grade R learners and I would like you to consider to consent to participate in my research. In order to enable you to make an informed decision, I can share with you the following information:*

### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to develop a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in E and R communities. In order to develop such a programme, it is vital that the views of professionals / parents in the communities with regards to parenting and school readiness be obtained. As a parent or professional rendering social services in the area, your input will make a valuable contribution.

### **2. PROCEDURE**

If you agree to be in this study you will be expected to attend one group discussion on (date) at (venue) that will last approximately one hour. The discussion will deal with the school readiness of Grade R learners, how parents contribute to their children's school readiness and the positive and negative aspects of parenting in R/E community. Your participation will be voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time.

Since the discussion will take place in a group, anonymity will be impossible, but identifying details of participants will be regarded as confidential. Audio recordings will be made of the discussion. For the duration of the research all sensitive information will be stored on a password protected computer. At the conclusion of the research, the results will be stored in a safe at the office of the Centre for Child-, Youth and Family Studies of the university, where it will be destroyed after 5 years. Only the line manager of this centre will have access to the safe and she will be responsible for the record keeping and destroying of the information.

### **3. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

Your participation will cause no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you. However, your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time even after agreeing to participate.

### **4. BENEFITS**

I trust that the proposed parenting programme will benefit participating parents and learners by enhancing learners' school readiness, enabling them to enter the school system successfully and also enrich the parent-child relationship of participants. Healthier parenting and learners who succeed in school will benefit the community as a whole.

### **5. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study. Transport can be arranged should you need it in which case you will need to sign an indemnity form.

### **6. PAYMENT**

You will receive no payment for participation, but refreshments will be served at the focus group.

### **7. QUESTIONS**

You are welcome to ask me any questions before you decide to give consent. I can be contacted at 021-938 3075. You are also welcome to contact Dr. Mariette van der Merwe, my study supervisor, at 021 864 3593 if you have any further questions concerning your consent. This research project was approved by the Health

Research Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences of North-West University. Should you have questions with regards to the ethical aspects of the research, you are welcome to write to this committee at [ethics@nwu.ac.za](mailto:ethics@nwu.ac.za) or the secretary, Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 2992094.

## 8. FEEDBACK OF FINDINGS

The findings of the research will be shared with you during a feedback session as soon as it is available after the study, if you are interested. You are welcome to contact us regarding the findings of the research.

## CONSENT FORM

### PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.

You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have signed the form to give consent, without any consequences.

Should you be willing to participate you are requested to sign below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above mentioned study. I am not coerced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation as well as what might be the possible risks and should I need further discussions someone will be available.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeanne Brown



## **Developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners**

CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT: FOCUS GROUP:

GRADE 1 PARENTS

*I am a Social Work student from the North-West University doing research about the influence of parents on the school readiness of Grade R learners and I would like you to consider to consent to participate in my research. In order to enable you to make an informed decision, I can share with you the following information:*

### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to develop a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in E and R communities. In order to develop such a programme, it is important that the opinion of people in the communities with regards to parenting and school readiness be obtained. As a parent who has just had a child in Grade R, your input will make a valuable contribution.

### **2. PROCEDURE**

If you agree to be in this study you will be expected to attend one group discussion on (date) at (venue) that will last approximately one hour. The discussion will deal with the school readiness of Grade R learners, how parents contribute to their children's school readiness and the positive and negative aspects of parenting in R/E community. Your participation will be voluntary and you will be free to withdraw at any time.

Since the discussion will take place in a group, anonymity will be impossible, but identifying details of participants will be regarded as confidential. Audio recordings will be made of the discussion. For the duration of the research all sensitive information will be stored on a password protected computer. At the conclusion of the research, the results will be stored in a safe at the office of the Centre for Child-, Youth and Family Studies of the university, where it will be destroyed after 5 years. Only the line manager of this centre will have access to the safe and she will be responsible for the record keeping and destroying of the information.

### **3. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

Your participation will cause no foreseeable risk or discomfort to you. However, your participation is completely voluntary and you are free to withdraw at any time even after agreeing to participate.

### **4. BENEFITS**

Your participation may not directly benefit you, but I trust that the proposed parenting programme will benefit many parents and learners in your community by improving learners' school readiness, enabling them to enter the school system successfully and also improve the parent-child relationship of participants. Healthier parenting and learners who succeed in school will benefit the community as a whole.

### **5. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study. Transport can be arranged should you need it in which case you will need to sign an indemnity form.

### **6. PAYMENT**

You will receive no payment for participation, but refreshments will be served at the focus group.

### **7. QUESTIONS**

You are welcome to ask me any questions before you decide to give consent. I can be contacted at 021-938 3075. You are also welcome to contact Dr. Mariette van der Merwe, my study supervisor, at 021 864 3593 if you have any further questions

concerning you consent. This research project was approved by the Health Research Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences of North-West University. Should you have questions with regards to the ethical aspects of the research, you are welcome to write to this committee at [ethics@nwu.ac.za](mailto:ethics@nwu.ac.za) or the secretary, Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 2992094.

## 8. FEEDBACK OF FINDINGS

The findings of the research will be shared with you during a feedback session as soon as it is available after the study, if you are interested. You are welcome to contact us regarding the findings of the research.

## CONSENT FORM

### PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.

You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have signed the form to give consent, without any consequences.

Should you be willing to participate you are requested to sign below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above mentioned study. I am not forced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation as well as what might be the possible risks and should I need further discussions someone will be available.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeanne Brown



## **Developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners**

### **Developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners**

#### **CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT: PARENT AND CHILD**

*I am a Social Work student from the North-West University doing research about the influence of parents on the school readiness of Grade R learners and I would like to invite you to participate in my research. In order to enable you to make an informed decision, I can share with you the following information:*

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to develop and present a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of the Grade R learners of R or E Primary Schools. As a Grade R parent, you and your child are being invited to participate in this research. Your participation will be very valuable to me.

#### **2. PROCEDURE**

If you agree to be in this study you will be expected to attend a one hour session once a week at R/E school at (time) for approximately 16 sessions. The Grade R learners will join their parents for the second half hour of each session for games and activities. You are therefore also asked to give permission that your child will join you for 30 minutes each session. The sessions will take place at the end of the school day when parents come to school to fetch their children. When the sessions are concluded, an interview will be arranged with you to obtain your view on how you experienced the programme. If you consent to participate, you are also

requested to your give permission that your Grade R child's school assessment marks may be obtained from his/her class teacher, in order to compare it to that of Grade R learners who do not participate in the research.

### **3. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

I do not foresee that the programme poses any risk to you or your child. However, you are assured that, should you or your child feel uncomfortable or cannot continue with the programme, you will be free to withdraw without any consequences. You are also free to decline the invitation to participate in this programme and you don't have to provide reasons for your decision. Should you need counselling during the course of the programme, you will be referred to a professional person.

The results of the research may be published, but your name will never be made known and your data will be handled as confidentially as possible. No identifying details will be used in any publications resulting from this study and only I and my study supervisor will work with the information that you shared. Voice recordings will be made of all the sessions. These recordings as well as all sensitive information will be protected storing it on a password protected computer during the research process. After the research has been completed all recordings and other data will be stored in a safe at the offices of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies where it will be destroyed after five years. Only one line manager will have access to the safe and she will be responsible for record-keeping and destroying the data.

### **4. BENEFITS**

Participating in the programme will hopefully be of benefit to your Grade R child by improving his/her school readiness and enabling him/her to enter the school system well prepared and confident. I foresee that your participation might also contribute to your knowledge of child development and enrich your relationship with your child.

### **5. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study.

### **6. PAYMENT**

You will receive no payment for participation, but refreshments will be enjoyed before each session.

## **7. QUESTIONS**

You are welcome to ask me any questions before you decide to give consent. I can be contacted at 021-938 3075. You are also welcome to contact Dr. Mariette van der Merwe, my study supervisor, at 021 864 3593 if you have any further questions concerning your consent. This research project was approved by the Health Research Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences of North-West University. Should you have questions with regards to the ethical aspects of the research, you are welcome to write to this committee at [ethics@nwu.ac.za](mailto:ethics@nwu.ac.za) or the secretary, Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 2992094.

## **8. FEEDBACK OF FINDINGS**

The findings of the research will be shared with you if you are interested. As soon as the findings are available, you will be invited to attend a meeting at the school to share it with you.

## **CONSENT FORM**

### **PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.**

You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have signed the form to give consent, without any consequences.

Should you be willing to participate you are requested to sign below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above mentioned study. I am not coerced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation as well as what might be the possible risks and should I need further discussions someone will be available.

I hereby also confirm that my Grade R child, ....., understands the implications of participating in the research and that he/she gave assent to participate.

---

Date

---

Signature of the participant

---

Date

---

Jeanne Brown



## **Developing a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners: Grade R parent**

### CONSENT TO BE A RESEARCH PARTICIPANT: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

*I am a Social Work student from the North-West University doing research about the influence of parents on the school readiness of Grade R learners and I would like to invite you to participate in my research. In order to enable you to make an informed decision, I can share with you the following information:*

#### **1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to develop and present a parenting skills programme to enhance the school readiness of the Grade R learners of R or E Primary Schools. As a Grade R parent who has just participated in the parenting skills programme, your opinion of the programme will be very valuable to me.

#### **2. PROCEDURE**

If you agree to participate, you need to agree to attend an informal discussion of about 30 minutes with me about the programme. I would like to know if the programme is of value to you and your child, what you liked and disliked about it and how I can improve the programme.

#### **3. RISKS/DISCOMFORTS**

I do not foresee that the programme poses any risk to you or your child. However, you are assured that, should you, feel uncomfortable or cannot continue with the discussion, you will be free to withdraw without any consequences. You are also free to decline the invitation to participate in this programme and you don't have to provide reasons for your decision.

The results of the research may be published, but your name will never be made known and the information that you give me will be handled as confidentially as possible. No identifying details will be used in any publications resulting from this study and only I and my study supervisor will work with the information that you shared. A voice recording will be made of all the discussion. This recording as well as all sensitive information will be protected by storing it on a password protected computer during the research process. After the research has been completed all recordings and other data will be stored in a safe at the offices of the Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies where it will be destroyed after five years. Only one line manager will have access to the safe and she will be responsible for record-keeping and destroying the data.

#### **4. BENEFITS**

Participating in the programme will hopefully be of benefit to your Grade R child by improving his/her school readiness and enabling him/her to enter the school system well prepared and confident. I foresee that your participation might also contribute to your knowledge of child development and enrich your relationship with your child.

#### **5. COSTS**

There will be no cost to you as a result of your participation in this study.

#### **6. PAYMENT**

You will receive no payment for participation.

#### **7. QUESTIONS**

You are welcome to ask me any questions before you decide to give consent. I can be contacted at 021-938 3075. You are also welcome to contact Dr. Mariette van der Merwe, my study supervisor, at 021 864 3593 if you have any further questions concerning your consent. This research project was approved by the Health Research Committee, Faculty of Health Sciences of North-West University. Should you have questions with regards to the ethical aspects of the research, you are welcome to write to this committee at [ethics@nwu.ac.za](mailto:ethics@nwu.ac.za) or the secretary, Mrs Carolien van Zyl at 018 2992094.

**8. FEEDBACK OF FINDINGS**

The findings of the research will be shared with you if you are interested. As soon as the findings are available, your will be invited to attend a meeting at the school to share it with you.

**CONSENT FORM**

**PARTICIPATION IN THIS RESEARCH IS VOLUNTARY.**

You are free to decline to be in this study, or to withdraw at any point even after you have signed the form to give consent, without any consequences.

Should you be willing to participate you are requested to sign below:

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby voluntarily consent to participate in the above mentioned study. I am not coerced in any way to participate and I understand that I can withdraw at any time should I feel uncomfortable during the study. I also understand that my name will not be disclosed to anybody who is not part of the study and that the information will be kept confidential and not linked to my name at any stage. I also understand what I might benefit from participation as well as what might be the possible risks and should I need further discussions someone will be available.

I hereby also confirm that my Grade R child, \_\_\_\_\_, understands the implications of participating in the research and that he/she gave assent to participate.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Jeanne Brown

## ANNEXURE H

CODING TO IDENTIFY THE TOPICS OF THE PARENTING PROGRAMME				
Focus group discussions	Literature study on school readiness and the role of parents in the development of SR			
Parenting practices	Code	Components of SR	Parent's role - literature	Intervention / program
Poverty Few resources Parents not involved Neglect leads to serious physical delays and stunted growth No immunisations	PHYS	Physical – health Fine motor dev Gross motor dev	<b>Good physical care</b> <b>Fine: Cutting, writing</b> <b>Gross Sports, games</b>	Activities for fine and gross motor dev
Parents don't talk properly to their children Teenage parents – 15,16,17 not ready to be parents Parents lack knowledge Low level of education No parenting skills Lack of bonding with child Poverty, stress Do not spend time with children, not involved Children do not have basic body knowledge No exposure to books No reading No reading materials, only SON No stimulation or exposure to healthy resources Children poor vocabulary	COG	<b>Cognitive development</b> Sufficient understanding of the language of teaching and learning Understand and speak confidently in his mother tongue Ability to respond to simple instructions The ability to distinguish between what he sees and what he listens to The difference between a word and a picture Ability to page through a book Ability to join in when singing a song or saying a rhyme Ability to solve simple problems Ability to build a jig-	<b>interact meaningfully new opportunities and activities sports and play reading to a child at home, educational activities, asking a child about school good communication speaking and listening games, jigsaw, picture matching games or sorting and grading objects or shapes spatial orientation up, down, forward and backward reading home literacy practices providing writing and drawing materials for scribbling and pretending to be writing, participating in conversations and identifying letters and words singing, drawing, reciting</b>	Information – school readiness Teach responsiveness Stories Activities – cutting, counting, colouring, reading, writing materials Colours, shapes, sorting, size, quantity, opposites Coloured wheels, buttons Stimulate conversation Music, singing Games – snakes & ladders

		saw puzzle Pre-literacy Pre-numeracy	<b>verses, game playing shared book reading size and quantity such as big, small, little, more, some and heavy new activities and experiences</b>	
<p>Neglect – lack of attachment figures</p> <p>Uncaring parents</p> <p>Parents work long hours</p> <p>Poverty / substance abuse / neglect</p> <p>Overcrowding, poor basic amenities</p> <p>Depressed parents</p> <p>Not consistent parenting</p> <p>Harsh parenting</p> <p>Parents cannot talk about feelings</p> <p>Do not support children in dealing with feelings</p> <p>Lots of aggression in children</p> <p>Fighting in schools</p> <p>Violence in community</p> <p>Family violence, parents arguing</p> <p>Bad example of friends</p> <p>“Dit is na jy weke en maande ‘n pad stap saam met hierdie mense en hulle presies verduidelik wat moet gebeur. En mens werk altyd vanuit hierdie perspektief en kyk watse skills hulle het, en jy kyk – verduidelik aan hulle wat moet gebeur. En as dit nie gebeur nie, hoekom die kind moontlik verwyder gaan word. En dan, eventually, wanneer die kind verwyder word dan is – dis net daai verstaan is net nie daar nie. Jy kan mooi sit, en mooi praat keer op keer, en sessie na sessie. En, dit is net asof die mense net nie regtig dit begryp nie. Daai basiese beginsel van hoekom jy op ‘n sekere manier met jou kind</p>	<b>EMO</b>	<p><b>Emotional development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Separate easily from the parent</li> <li>• Accept adult authority and</li> <li>• Submit himself to routine</li> <li>• Sit still and listen for a reasonable length of time to the teacher</li> <li>• Complete a simple task independently</li> </ul>	<p><b>Warm responsive parenting</b></p> <p><b>Closeness of an attachment figure</b></p> <p><b>Consistent, loving parenting</b></p> <p><b>caring, responsivity</b></p> <p><b>manage child’s feelings</b></p> <p><b>regulate their emotions for them</b></p> <p><b>name their feelings and talk through it</b></p> <p><b>model appropriate expression of emotions create an environment that encourages its development</b></p>	<p>Attachment</p> <p>Self-control of parents</p> <p>Role model of feelings</p> <p>Parents need to be taught how to deal with feelings and share with children</p> <p>Self-control</p> <p>Create a calm, friendly atmosphere in home</p>

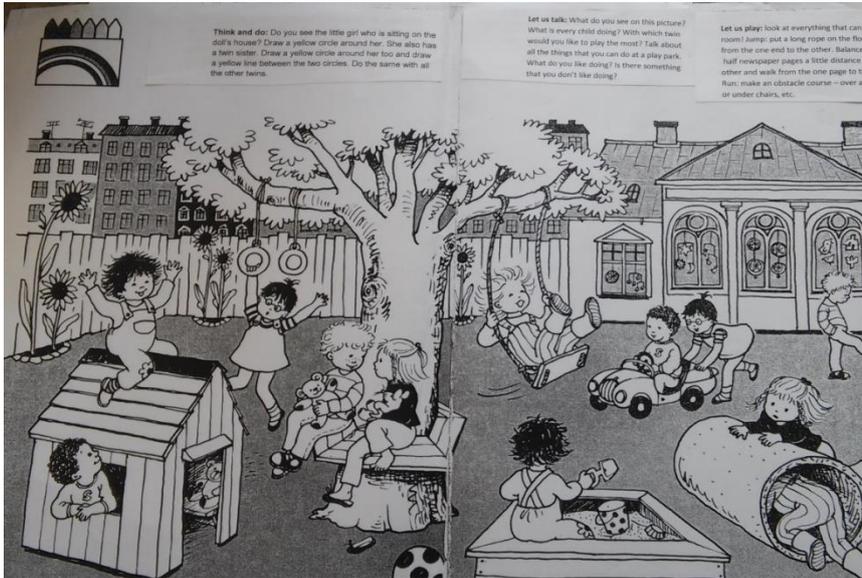
moet werk...				
<p>Insecure attachments Neglect / harsh parenting/ violence Poverty /stress/ parents too involved with survival, don't have time for children Don't spend time with children</p>	APPR	<p><b>Approaches to learning</b> the interest and persistence with which children approach learning activities child's curiosity and motivation to learn, perseverance, the ability to focus on relevant stimuli, the way in which a child approaches a task and solves problems, as well as interaction with peers and adults.</p>	<p><b>autonomy, competence and a secure relationship with the teacher</b> <b>feeling of relatedness to parents</b> <b>home learning activities</b> <b>emphasize their children's intrinsic abilities and successful efforts</b> <b>home based activities provided</b> <b>learning opportunities</b> <b>regular parent-child reading and provision of ample reading materials</b> <b>Having a dream or a vision</b> <b>Resilience</b></p> <p><b>Problems:</b> <b>felt rejected or ignored by or alienated from their parents, educators and peers</b> <b>maternal depression</b></p>	<p>Attachment Activities Spend time with children Build self-esteem, praise efforts Provide learning opportunities Reading Build resilience</p>
<p>Insecure attachment Cannot build bond with children Neglectful Poverty/unemployment Too busy working or not caring</p>	SOC	<p><b>Social development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to submit to adult authority</li> <li>• The ability to submit to routine</li> <li>• Regulate his own</li> </ul>	<p><b>within the bond or attachment</b> <b>respond to their babies' needs</b> <b>interact</b> <b>basic attachment is formed.</b></p>	<p>Attachment Practical activities Teach children's needs Teach – role</p>

<p>Cannot provide in needs          Poor interaction          Drug abuse          No parenting skills          Not involved          Violence in families and community          Influence of gangs          Fathers often not involved          Unemployed fathers don't care          Children aggressive          Parents poor role models          Children imitate – sue          Bad influence of other children</p>		<p>behaviour</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to work in a group</li> <li>• positive self-concept and self-confidence</li> <li>• independence to care for themselves</li> <li>• obeying rules</li> <li>• build positive relationships with peers and adults</li> <li>• and respecting rules and values</li> <li>• obey class rules</li> <li>• adhere to the social expectations</li> <li>• socially acceptable behaviour</li> <li>• values, knowledge and skills</li> <li>• self-control and social propriety problems:              insecure attachment              neglected</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sensitive and responsive caregiving</b>  <b>Expectations of future relationships</b>  <b>Values and rules engagement</b>  <b>(supportive and sensitive parenting, encouraged autonomy and participation in learning)</b>  <b>not isolated from peers and significant adults</b>  <b>help children to become well integrated</b>  <b>accept increasing responsibility for self-management</b></p>	<p>models          How to convey values to children          Social skills, teaching          adherence to rules and social expectations          Work in a group, sharing          Building self-esteem to resist peer pressure</p>
<p>Lack of caring, sensitive parenting          Parents poor role models          Not involved          Substance abuse          Violence          Harsh punishment          Little support</p>	<p>SOC</p>	<p><b>Self-regulation is the foundation of socialisation</b>          biological -,          attentional -,          emotional -,          behavioural - and          cognitive regulation</p>	<p><b>sensitive parenting and the warm, supportive bond</b>  <b>good cognitive and emotional support when challenging tasks</b>  <b>exercise a measure of autonomy</b></p>	<p>Attachment          Positive discipline          Teach self-control          Teach emotional support</p>

<p>“En sy skel daar van – sy gaan wys vir my waar haar ma is, en so word ek maar gevloek in die lelikste ...”</p> <p>SW4</p> <p>Die stryery oor die kinderondersteuningstoelae, dis ook ‘n groot issue in die gemeenskap. Want jy kry nou ‘n toelaag wat ‘n dwelmslaaf is, en die kinders bly by ouma. Die geld kom nooit – bereik nooit die kinders nie.</p>	<p>SOC</p>	<p><b>Moral development</b> part of socialization and is the process of learning what is right and wrong</p>	<p><b>Continuous guidance from parents</b> <b>rules are based on values</b> <b>need to realise what contribution their behaviour makes to the welfare of themselves, other people and the environment</b> <b>when child defaults: discuss the incident, its consequences and how it made others feel.</b> <b>specific family rules – learn to apply wider rules of interaction between a child and an adult – peers</b> <b>positive experiences + dynamics of intimate family relationships – profound effect on moral development</b> <b>Parental warmth and empathy NB</b></p>	
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# ANNEXURE I

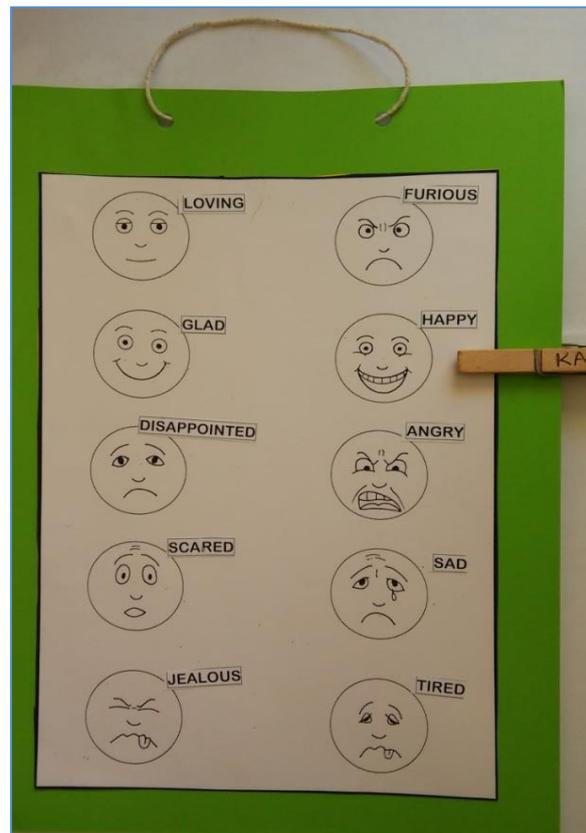
## ELEMENTS OF THE PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMME



Carnival picture (see 5.6.3)



Coloured wheels (see 5.6.4)



Feelings chart (see 5.6.4)

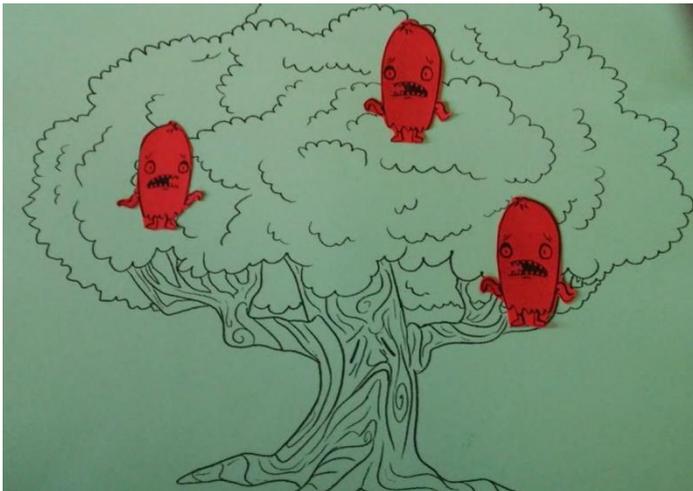




Play dough and picture (see 5.6.6)

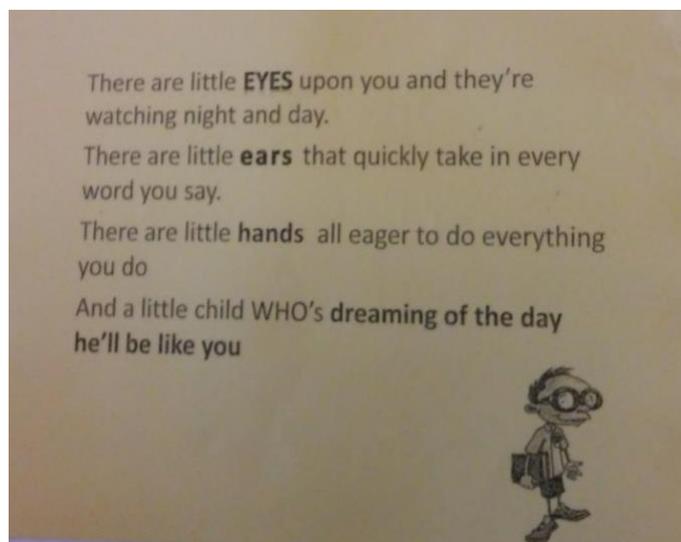


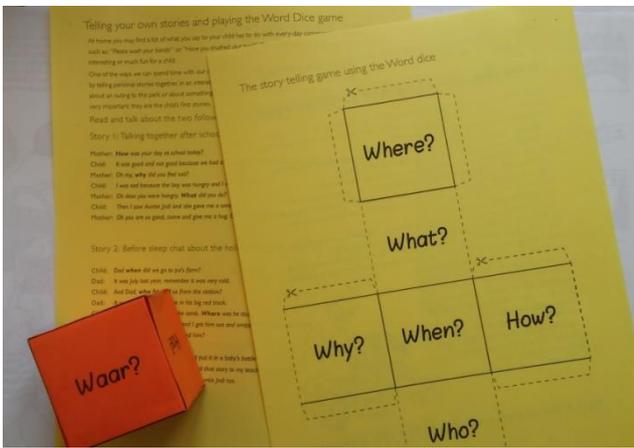
Colourful buttons (see 5.6.13)



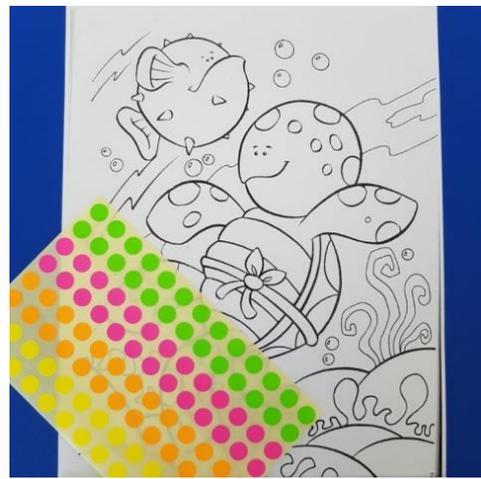
Tree to put the worry monsters on (see 5.6.9)

Handout with identity development information pack (see 5.6.7)





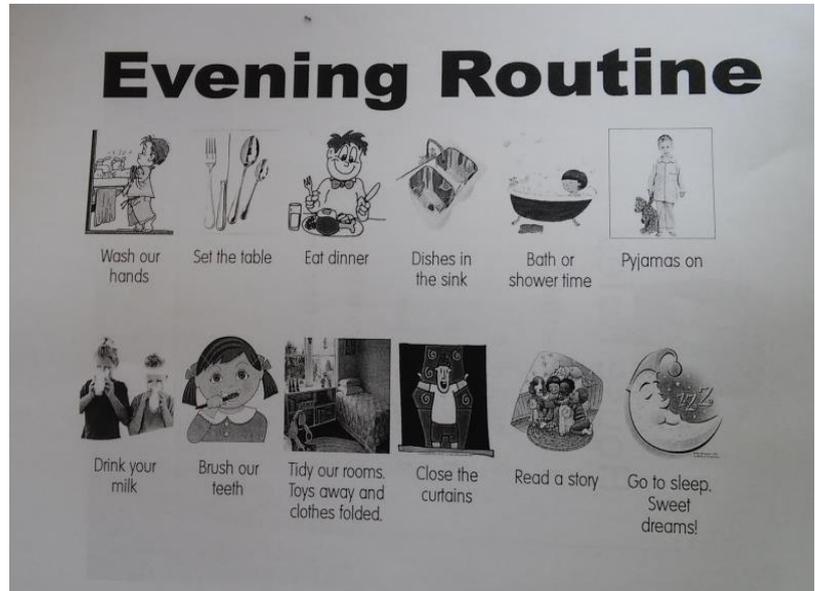
The word dice game to encourage conversation (see 5.6.11)



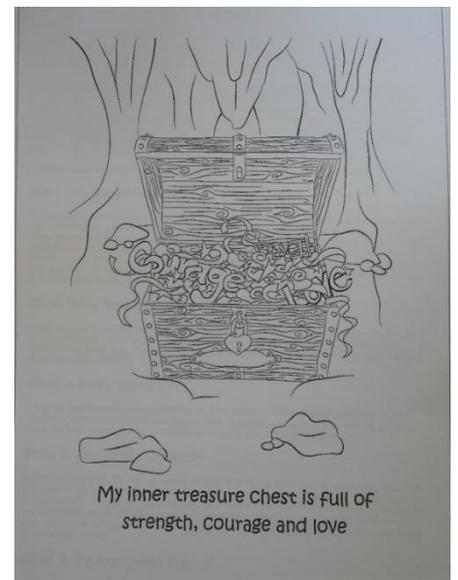
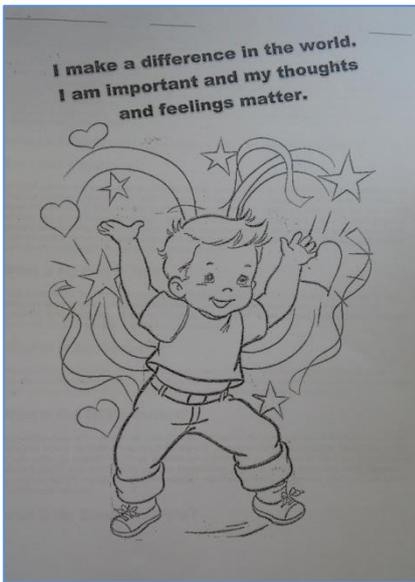
Paste the dots (see 5.6.5)



Social development colouring page. The words are: When I am kind, I spread joy and make others feel good.



Evening routine (see 5.6.5)



Mindfulness colouring pages (5.6.11)



Fishes game (see 5.6.2)

**RESILIENCE**

Resilience is people's ability to go overcome difficulties and hard times and to bounce back without letting the difficulties harm their lives

Children are resilient when they can say:

**I HAVE**

- People around me I trust and who love me no matter what
- People who set limits for me so I know when to stop before there is danger or trouble
- People who show me how to do things right by the way they do things
- People who want me to learn to do things on my own
- People who help me when I am sick, in danger or need to learn

**I AM**

- A person people can like and love
- Glad to do nice things for others and show my concern
- Respectful of myself and others
- Willing to be responsible for what I do
- Sure things will be all right

**I CAN**

- Talk to others about things that frighten or bother me
- Find ways to solve problems I face
- Control myself when I feel like doing something not right or dangerous
- Figure out when it is a good time to talk to someone or to take action
- Find someone to help me when I need it

For a child to be resilient, he or she needs to have more than one of these strengths. For example, if a child has plenty of self-esteem (I AM), but lacks anyone whom they can turn to for support (I HAVE), and does not have the capacity solve problems (I CAN), they will not be resilient. This finding is in line with other research showing that resiliency is the product of a number of mutually enhancing protective factors. It is not a personality attribute, but the result of many factors which combine to buffer a child against the potentially harmful effects of adversity.

(Reproduced from Grotberg, E. (1995))

Resilience handout for parents

ANNEXURE J



Certificate awarded to the Grade R participants (see 5.6.13)



Certificate awarded to the participating parents (see 5.6.13)

## ANNEXURE K

Schedule for semi-structured interviews with parents of Participant groups 2 & 4

### INTERVIEW WITH PARENTS (Participant groups 2 and 4)

#### Introduction

How was your holiday and how are you doing?

#### Profile information

Gender	
Age	
Relationship to the Grade R learner	
Education	
Occupation	
Marital status	
Home language	
Family composition	
Challenges in family	

Where did you hear about the “My child is a Winner”-program?

What made you decide to attend?

Can you remember – after the first session, what made you decide to attend further sessions?

If we have a look at the sessions – what did you learn from each (refer to last page)

How do you feel about the following:

- Venue
- Time
- Was it too long/short
- Pace too fast /too slow
- Sessions that were boring
- Did not understand notes or instructions
- Activities – were they practical enough for you to follow and apply?

What did you like most / least?

What did you learn that you can still apply in the way that you parent your child?

How has the programme influenced your child, if any?

- Relationship with parent(s)
- Self-confidence
- School progress
- Behaviour at school
- Behaviour at home
- Socially
- Other

What did you learn that you can apply in your own life?

What changes can you suggest for the program to be improved?

## **SESSIONS**

Love Languages

Self-image

Positive discipline

Dealing with feelings

Self-control and delayed gratification

Teach your child to think positively

Fun and humour

Social development

Identity development (2)

+ Parent wellness

The role of play in the development of school readiness

## ANNEXURE L

### Transcription of part of the interview with Parent 3

**INTERVIEWER:** And what made you decide to come?

**RESPONDENT:** Its S... ... when I gave birth to S..., he's that kind of a child whom I didn't understand what kind of a child he is. He was like in a shell. He couldn't speak out himself. I couldn't understand him who he is. I didn't understand him.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. And did you hope to maybe ...

**RESPONDENT:** So when they said 'My Child is a Winner', you must learn more about your child, so I'm like, wow, this is for me. Already he's in Grade R. I don't even know what S... is. If you come to me, I won't tell you what kind of S... he is. And I didn't understand him. So it was for me. To me, when I saw that, I'm like, wow, this if for me.

**INTERVIEWER:** Has it made a difference?

**RESPONDENT:** A big difference. So amazing. Because now, S... can play and S... can talk, and if he doesn't want something he can tell you, no, I don't want this. If there's another child who is doing something which is wrong to him, he'll say no, don't do that to me. I don't like it. And if he's upset, he will come and say, mommy, I want to tell you something. I've got bad news for you. I'm not okay.

**INTERVIEWER:** Really?

**RESPONDENT:** Yes. And then I will like, oh, you are not okay? Yes. I want to hear the bad news. The bad news is, Junior is doing this and this and this and I don't like it.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is Junior now the cousin?

**RESPONDENT:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** Okay. And he comes and tells?

**RESPONDENT:** Yes. And then even at school, if there's something wrong, which went wrong, he'll tell me, mama, let me tell you something. I've got something to tell you. At school this and this and this ... like what you said we must listen and then ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Respond.

**RESPONDENT:** Yes. So, to me I see a big, big change. Even if he wants to tell me something good, he will say, mommy, I've got good news for you. What's the good news? Look, I cleaned the house. Wow! Its good news. I'm so happy for you. And then I will hug him. Or sometimes he'll say, mommy, I need some love, can I give you a hug? You are going to work, can I give you ... its like he's talking to me and then I talk back to him. He's a child that I can see, oh, okay. If they do something wrong in the house he would tell them, you don't do that. Mommy said we mustn't do that. When Granny comes I'm gonna tell Granny that you are doing the wrong thing. So I'm seeing a big change.

**INTERVIEWER:** Wonderful. Can you remember after the first session, you remember we did the first session on the five love languages?

**RESPONDENT:** Yes.

**INTERVIEWER:** What made you decide you want to come back?

**RESPONDENT:** The way you taught us, because you said, the first section when you were talking about love, you must give them love, we must hug them, we can give them love by

hugging, you can give them love by brushing their back, so that thing, I went home and I tried it. And I saw, wow, its something else. And I find myself, because S..., we never get that bond, because most of the time when I moved out to Parklands, my mom stayed in with the kids. So, that bond me and him, most of the time I was in and out, like a busy mom, going up and down, looking for food for the kids. No time for kids. When I come back he's sleeping. Tomorrow morning, also the same thing. So I didn't have that bond with S... like N..., I spent most of my time with her when she was young. But S... it was a different story. I only spent only about one year time with him, but after that he never experienced my truly love. Its like hello, hi, and then the thing I'm ...

**INTERVIEWER:** Gone and out.

**RESPONDENT:** Yes. Because it's a hectic day, I have to work, I have to do this, I have to clean the house or have to do the washing. Even when I greet them, and then I have to do their washing, I have to clean the house. There's a lot of responsibility which I have to do. I'm a busy mom. I don't have time for the kids.

**INTERVIEWER:** Is it different now L...?

**RESPONDENT:** Now its different. I learned that you, even if you are a busy mom, you can give your kids two hours. It makes a difference in your life. Every day if you give them two hours, to be with them, listen to them, play with them, as them what they want. If they do something ... if they've got surprises for you, accept it and then just buy them something and acknowledge them. If they do something, just acknowledge them. Now they've got the tendency of, they will ask, mommy, can we massage your feet? I say yes. And then after that you're gonna buy me some chocolates isn't it? Because there's this thing that I learned from you, which you said, we must award them when they do something good. Even now Granny, my mom, and my stepfather also award her when she does something good.

**INTERVIEWER:** Really? Does it work?

**RESPONDENT:** Yes. It does work for them. Now, she's always the busy person. And when they talk to her, it's just like this.

**INTERVIEWER:** Obedient?

**RESPONDENT:** Yes, like I have to do it. Even if she doesn't get something. But when they say thank you, you are a star. She's like, oh I'm a star. You know guys, me I'm a star. Yes you are a genius, give me five, and a kiss. They love that. I learned something about your teaching.

**INTERVIEWER:** That's the discipline, the reward then ...

**RESPONDENT:** Yes. I learned something, because it make a big impact to my kids.

## **ANNEXURE M**

### **A PARENTING SKILLS PROGRAMME TO ENHANCE SCHOOL READINESS OF GRADE R LEARNERS: A SOCIAL WORK PERSPECTIVE**

Ms. Jeanne Brown, PhD student; Dr Mariette van der Merwe, Centre for Child, Youth and Family Studies, COMPRES, Faculty of Health Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, South Africa.

#### **Abstract**

Parenting plays a determining role in the development of school readiness. Socio-economic adversity often has a detrimental effect on the quality of parenting, which in turn impacts negatively on school readiness of their children. Intervention research was done to develop and implement a parenting skills programme for parents of Grade R learners in two resource poor communities. The results indicate that parents have the ability to improve in important areas of parenting that could enhance the school readiness of their Grade R children, namely the quality of the parent-child relationship, parent-child interaction and creating a home learning environment.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

School readiness was traditionally seen as an educational domain with the focus on cognitive skills. However, with the expansion of the concept of school readiness to include non-cognitive domains of social and emotional skills (Lau, Li & Rau, 2011:97; UNICEF, 2012: 9-10; Van Zyl, 2011:35), the role of parents in the development of school readiness has come increasingly under the spotlight. The check list for school readiness of the Western Cape Department of Education (2012) includes skills such as feeling secure enough to separate from the parent, acceptance of adult authority, completing simple tasks and the ability to converse confidently in the mother tongue. These are skills that develop while the child is still predominantly in the care of the parent or primary caregiver. This shift in focus brings into play the role that social workers can play in the promotion of school readiness. They are in an ideal position to reach parents of young children and to work with them towards the school readiness of their children. This article reports on a specific phase of intervention research which was aimed at developing a parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in two resource poor communities. The important role that parents play in the development of school readiness and the contribution that social workers can make will be discussed.

#### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

Over the past decades early childhood has emerged in literature as a vitally important developmental phase that impacts significantly on children's well-being and functioning in all the successive developmental phases (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011a; Lake, 2007:1277; McClelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000:307-308; Skweyiya, 2006:1). According to the 2011 Census

(StatsSA) there are 5.6 million children between the ages of 0-4 and 4.8 million children between the ages of 5-9 years in South Africa. Ideally, early childhood development culminating in school readiness should facilitate pathways for these children to flourish, as outlined by Keyes (2013:4). Unfortunately approximately 40% of children in South Africa grow up in conditions of extreme poverty and neglect, leading to an increased risk of stunted growth, poor adjustment to school, failing grades and eventually dropout from school (Department of Education's White Paper 5 on Early Childhood Development, 2001:5). According to Van der Merwe (2014:3) in 2003 nationally only 50% of Grade 2 learners, completed matric in 2013. Without adequate schooling children face a bleak future.

The problem of poverty and inequality is affecting the quality of life of millions of South Africans. Twenty-two years into democracy the apartheid legacy of unequal education is still thwarting many young people's aspirations for upward social and economic mobility (De Lannoy, Leibbrand & Frame, 2015:23). The one strong weapon to combat poverty, namely education, is being hindered by the dysfunctional school system that fails to prepare youth to enter the labour market with positive prospects (Spaull, 2015:34). However, not all the blame can be put on the South African school system. An important reason for the poor performance is learners not coping academically at an early stage in their school career (Gustafsson, 2011:21; Louw, Bayat & Eigelaar-Meets, 2011:17; Spaull, 2015:36). In this regard there is ample evidence that learners who enter the school system without the required school readiness, fall behind their peers from the outset and fail to catch up (Bruwer, Hartell & Steyn, 2014:27; Centre on the Developing Child, 2016:3).

The fact that parents influence their children's academic performance is well documented. Research points to parents and various parenting practices as a key element in the development of the different domains of school readiness (Cowan & Cowan, 2002:75; Li, Chan, Mak & Lam, 2013:3; Morrison & Cooney, 2012:144-156; Sheridan, Knoche, Edwards, Bovaird & Kupzyk, 2010:128; Wade, 2004:199). When parents raise their children in challenging socio-economic circumstances, the quality of their parenting could be impaired and this could have a detrimental impact on their children's early development and school readiness. Focus group discussions with role players in the two target communities revealed that the parents in the target communities are faced with serious socio-economic challenges as mentioned above. However, the damaging effects of these stressors can be averted or reversed when young children are provided with at least one responsive, nurturing relationship (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011). The premise of this study was that parents are ideally the persons who can offer their children the opportunity to have such a supportive relationship with an adult and that they have the potential to develop the appropriate parenting behaviours to enhance their children's school readiness.

## **RESEARCH CONTEXT**

As a social worker for the Department of Education in resource poor communities the first author has observed that children in the target communities are exposed to serious socio-economic problems, such as poverty, various forms of child abuse, parental substance abuse and domestic, community violence and gangsterism. Parents in the target communities are often indifferent to programmes presented in schools, especially parents who need such programmes the most. There are many possible reasons for this, including these parents' ignorance, their indifference to the needs of their children, feeling intimidated by services offered and fear of being belittled and criticized (Puckering, 2004:39, 51).

According to literature, the first author's observations as described above pose a serious risk to children's social, emotional and academic development and impact negatively on school readiness. Exposure to several adverse circumstances causes toxic stress that could seriously impact on children's brain development (Centre on the Developing Child, 2011b) Several authors have described the significant cumulative effect of poverty and the problems associated with poverty on the development of children (Beatty, 2013:71; Eamon, 2001:257; Mistry, Benner, Biesanz, Clark & Howes, 2010:433; Puckering, 2004:41, Sheridan, *et al.*, 2010: 126). Such exposure early in life negatively affects a child's brain development and children then enter school with a significant disadvantage compared to other children, which negatively influences their learning ability and behaviour (Beatty, 2013:72; Duncan & Murnane, 2011:9). Despite the above-mentioned problems, the ideal still exists for all children to complete their early developmental tasks successfully and to thrive in a home and school environment that is conducive to academic progress. It is imperative that any measures to improve children's school readiness should be implemented, including parenting skills development. As mentioned above, a caring relationship with one adult can counteract the negative effect of the above problems (Centre on the developing Child, 2011b:n.p.)

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

This study was done within the theoretical framework of Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems theory that regards human development as the product of proximal processes, consisting of constant and on-going reciprocal interactions between individuals and the people and things in their immediate environment, and that is also influenced by historical and life events (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006:795). In this regard, the role of context in child development is emphasised. Bronfenbrenner (1979:3) describes ecological context as a set of structures of which the one fits into the next like a set of Russian dolls. In the innermost structure is the developing person (or Grade R learner, for the purposes of this study). Visser (2012:25) points out that reality is complex with systems forming networks of interrelated relationships. The young child is mostly exposed to influences within the micro-environment of the

family, where the parents are the key role players. Infants naturally try to establish contact with the people in their environment through babbling and movements upon which parents normally respond with corresponding gestures. These vital reciprocal interactions between parent and child, described as 'serve and return' (as in tennis) by the Centre on the Developing Child (2011a:n.p.) influenced the development of the parenting programme. Still within the microsystem, the authors applied the concept of Vygotsky's 'more knowledgeable other' or 'competent associate' and the 'zone of proximal development'. These concepts denote that parents who are more knowledgeable than their children, model the activity or skill and offer support and advice to their children, who observe and imitate the parents' behaviour. New skills are then learnt and internalized, and the children's behaviour is regulated accordingly (Shaffer & Kipp, 2014:234).

The influence of factors in the macro- and meso environment was also taken into account. This influence is sometimes indirect in that it impacts on the quality of parenting that the children receive, although they may never have direct contact with these factors (Alice-Brown, 2013:17; Bronfenbrenner, 1979:3; Rosa & Tudge, 2013:244). The historical influences that could impact on early childhood development and school readiness in South Africa were investigated, because they could have a very detrimental impact on the quality of parenting that children in the target communities receive (Eamon, 2001:262; Puckering, 2004:38; Yoshikawa, Aber & Beardslee, 2012:273). Social and economic inequalities were taken into account, resulting from the apartheid regime (Atmore, 2013:152; Fleisch, 2008:76), and the fact that poverty is often associated with parenting problems such as a lack of responsive parenting, a less stimulating environment, a higher incidence of parental depression and domestic violence (Naudeau, Martinez, Premand & Filmer, 2011:22).

This study was qualitative in nature and the social constructivist stance that the authors adopted, formed the ideal framework within which the research could take place. From an ontological viewpoint the authors assumed that there are multiple realities, that reality is socially constructed and the participants could have varied and multiple interpretations for the same circumstances (Creswell, 2013:24; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:9; Teater, 2014:77). From an epistemological viewpoint the authors endeavoured to enter the world of the participants and put measures in place to bridge the distance that socio-economic and cultural difference could have placed between the authors and the participants (Creswell, 2013:20). This philosophical paradigm informed the research methodology and offered the opportunity to gather rich and varied data portraying the way that the participants construct their reality as described by Engelbrecht (2016:110) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016:6) and also the unique way in which the parents experienced the parenting programme.

## **AIM OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the main study was to use intervention research to develop a parenting skills programme aimed at enhancing school readiness in Grade R learners in resource poor communities. This report will focus on the findings of phase 4 of the intervention research process that answered the question: What is the effect/influence of the developed parenting skills programme on the school readiness of Grade R learners in two resource poor communities? The central theoretical statement of the main study was: If parents in resource poor communities are involved in parenting skills programmes where they engage with their children, they may be better equipped to provide a solid home environment with structure and adequate parenting to enhance their children's school readiness. \*\*

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

The research design was intervention research with the six phases of design and development (D&D), as described first by Rothman and Thomas (1994:31-33) and it is still used as a framework for research (Gilgun & Sands, 2012:350; De Vos & Strydom, 2011:480; Fraser & Galinsky, 2010:468). Gilgun (2012:1) regards intervention research as the bridge between academic research and practice. The first three phases consisted of the following:

Phase 1: Problem analysis and project planning

Phase 2: Information gathering and synthesis: A literature study was done on the role of parents in the development of school readiness. Three focus groups were conducted with professionals and parents working and living in the target communities.

Phase 3: Design of the intervention: The data gathered above were analysed, and three components for a parenting programme to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities, were derived from the data. Twelve topics addressing these components were then identified. The components and corresponding topics were the following:

Component 1: The parent-child relationship (1 session): The five love languages.

Component 2: Social and emotional development (8 sessions): Building my child's self-esteem, positive discipline, dealing with feelings, how to convey values to my child, developing self-control and delayed gratification, social development, the value of play and identity development.

Component 3: Building resilience (3 sessions): Teaching children to think positively, humour and fun and parent wellness.

The sessions were developed around these twelve topics with a variety of activities for each session that parents and children could do together. The following principles guided the development of the programme and had a profound impact on the programme:

- Involving parents and Grade R learners together in the programme to give the parents the opportunity of hands-on training and interaction with their Grade R children (Christopher, Saunders, Jacobvitz, Burton & Hazen, 2013:776).

- Using a strengths based approach as described by Condrat (2014:39) and Teater (2014:44) and thereby avoiding using a deficit model where parents will be stigmatized as “at risk” or “vulnerable” (Jackson & Needham, 2014:41).
- Focusing on the parenting role and not to try and make educators of the parents, by empowering parents in the following areas that improve their children’s academic skills as suggested by Waldfogel and Washbrook (2008) in Mukherji and Dryden (2014:245): The quality of the parent-child attachment; the style of parenting that parents adopt; the learning environment that parents create in their home.
- Providing the opportunity for interaction and enjoyment in a safe environment with the assumption that this would strengthen the bond between parents and children and that learning would take place (Harman, O’Connor & Guilfoyle, 2014:132).
- Giving attention to parent wellness: Parents who parent in challenging circumstances need support to enhance their own emotional wellness. Only when parents are emotionally healthy and feel confident about their parenting abilities, can they function optimally as parents. When the contrary is true, they are less able to give their children quality care (Roberts, 2009:11 as quoted by Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:192).

Phase 4: Early development and pilot testing: The parenting programme was implemented in three schools in the two target areas. After making minor alterations the programme was again presented in the one target school the following year. In total 43 parents together with their children completed the parenting programme by attending eight or more sessions.

Phase 5: Evaluation and advanced development: Purposive sampling was used to select parents for semi-structured interviews by contacting parents who had attended all or most of the parenting sessions (Hays & Singh, 2012:255; Guthrie, 2010:121; Walliman, 2011:100). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with thirteen parents using an interview schedule according to guidelines provided in literature (Bless, Higson-Smith & Sithole, 2013:340; Braun & Clarke, 2013:92; Engelbrecht, 2016:113; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016:12) to obtain participating parents’ views on how their participation in the programme had influenced their parenting practices and their Grade R children’s school readiness/development. Open-ended questions were used to capture the richness of participants’ unique viewpoints and the first author was flexible and responsive to participants’ needs, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2013:79) and Nieuwenhuis (2016:93). Interviews were audio recorded with the participants’ consent for greater accuracy and data capturing (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:340; Braun & Clarke, 2013:92). Coding and a thematic analysis of the transcribed data were done according to Braun and Clarke (2013:178) and meaningful themes were identified.

## **ETHICS**

Ethical clearance was obtained from the ethics committee of the relevant university, and permission for the research was granted by the Western Cape Education Department.

The researcher also adhered to the ethical code of her profession as social worker. Strict ethical principles were followed according to guidelines in literature (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:32; Du Plessis, 2016:73). Bertram and Christiansen (2014:66) and Mukherji and Albon (2015:47) refer to the important principles of autonomy, non-maleficence and beneficence, signifying the importance of making a positive contribution to the lives of people and not taking advantage of the unequal power position that often exists between researcher and participant to do harm. This is especially applicable when working with vulnerable populations, such as young children (Mukherji & Albon, 2015:43). The principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality and the possible risks and benefits of the programme were discussed with participants. The researcher kept in mind that she was working with a vulnerable population and treated the participants with consideration and respect (Bless, *et al.*, 2013:34; Thomas, 2009:8-9).

### PROFILE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Profile of parents						
Participant number	Age	Relationship to Grade R learner	Level of education	Occupation	Marital status	Number of occupants in the house
P1	62	Biological father	Grade 9	Shuttle service (Taxi driver)	Living together	3
P2	27	Biological mother	Grade 12, busy with ECD training	Fulltime mother	Married, husband not the biological father of the Grade R learner	3
P3	37	Biological mother	Grade 11	Waitress		6
P4	31	Biological mother	Grade 12, studied 1 year secretarial qualification	Full-time mother	Married	5
P5	35	Biological father	Grade 12	Retrenched	Married	4
P6	48	Biological mother	Grade 12 and nursing	Nursing assistant	Single	2
P7	32	Biological mother	Grade 9	Unemployed	Single, doesn't know where the father of children is	3

P8	67	Grandmother	Grade 10	Unemployed	Married	9
P9	48	Biological mother	Grade 12	Nursing assistant	Divorced	5
P10	37	Biological mother	Grade 7	Home carer	Separated	8
P11		Biological father	Grade 12 and tertiary qualification	Quantity surveyor	Married	4
P12	24	Biological mother	Grade 9	Factory worker	Unmarried	5
P13		Biological mother	Grade 5	Unemployed, previously a cleaner	Married	4

The data that the parents divulged about their private life indicated that only two of them were in a stable 2-parent household.

## RESULTS

The researcher coded and analysed the data and extracted themes. Three themes were identified with regards to parenting behaviours that impact profoundly on the development of children's school readiness, namely the parent-child relationship, parents' interaction with their children and creating a home learning environment. The fourth theme, parental well-being, will also be referred to, since it emerged as an important factor in the parents' experience of the benefits of the programme.

### PARENTAL BEHAVIOURS THAT ENHANCE SCHOOL READINESS

In order to determine whether the programme had achieved the desired results, the authors returned to the literature study to determine what parenting behaviours conducive to the development of school readiness, were described. The data provided by the parents were then analysed to determine whether the programme had contributed to these desired parenting behaviours. The following results were obtained:

#### 6.3.6.1 Parent-child relationship

The literature study revealed that a secure attachment, or various aspects of a responsive, warm relationship with parents, played a role in the development of the following aspects of school readiness in young children:

- Cognitive development (Davies, 2011:44; Eshel, Daelmans, De Mello & Martines, 2006:992);
- Emotional and social skills (Gerhardt, 2009:2);
- Emotional development (Davies, 2011:9; Goleman, (introduction) *In* Lantieri, 2008:2);
- Moral development (Kopp, 2002:10; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:241);

- Approaches to learning (Furrer & Skinner, 2003:158);
- Relationship-building skills (Dowling, 2014:37; Kraemer, 2011:2; Martorell, *et al.*, 2014:232);
- Pro-social skills (Davies, 2011:256; King, *et.al.* 2005:318, 336; Smith, *et al.* (2011:304);
- Self-esteem (Kaplan & Owens, 2004:77; Pinto, *et al.*, 2015:592; Roberts, 2002:111; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:491; Zakeri & Karimpour, 2011:761); and
- Self-efficacy (Schunk & Pajares, 2001:4-5).

Martin, Ryan and Brooks-Gunn (2010:146) and Pitt, *et al.* (2013:3) confirm that optimal cognitive, behavioural-, social and emotional development of preschoolers is promoted by the warmth and responsivity provided by a mother.

Because of the role that the parent-child relationship plays in enhancing school readiness, a vital goal during the designing of the prototype was identified as, building a warm, responsive relationship between parents and their Grade R children. To the question how the programme had influenced their relationship with their Grade R children, the parents responded as follows:

- Seven of the parents indicated that their relationship with their child had improved significantly (P4, P6, P9, P11, P12, P13).
- Other parents (P1, P2, P5, P7) said that, although they have had a bond with their children previously, the quality of their relationship had improved and they now laughed and played (P1), they were sharing more (P2), the Grade R son had opened up and would now ask the mother things (P5), and the Grade R's lone time with the mother had become important to the Grade R (P7).
- Five parents indicated that, while their child had been closer to another caregiver before, the children had grown closer to these parents since the programme (P3, P4, P11, P12, P13). Two of these parents were the biological fathers. P4 (a mother) described the change as such: *'She was her daddy's girl. Never talked to me, never would have listened to me. She would just do what her daddy tells her to do ... But since the classes there's a ... we actually laugh together, we play together. We actually had a girls' day ... Actually that touched me the most, she didn't even ask, I wonder what's daddy doing?'*
- P5, P6, P11 and P13 mentioned that, for the first time, their children came to ask them things or talk about things, indicating an important improvement in the relationship. P12 said that her son now brought his educator's message book to her every evening to share with her what the educator had said in class.

In total 12 of the 13 parents interviewed confirmed that their relationship with their Grade R child had improved. Such warm and caring relationships lay the foundation for the development of school readiness and this can be regarded as a strong outcome of the programme.

#### 6.3.6.2 *Interaction with parents*

The programme was planned to promote interaction between parents and their Grade R children. A literature study confirmed the important role that parents' positive interaction with their children plays in the development of school readiness. It contributes to the development of:

- Cognitive development (Dowling, 2014:35; Jackson & Needham, 2014:39; Mukherji & Dryden, 2014:93; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:71; Shaffer & Kipp, 2010:56;)
- Literacy and numeracy (Lukie, *et al.*, 2014:257)
- Self-regulation (Davies, 2011:44)
- Prosocial behaviour (Farrant, *et al.*, 2012:183; Nantel-Vivier, *et al.*, 2014:1141)
- Moral development (Thompson & Twibell, 2009:214; Dunn, 2006, in Smith, *et al.*, 2011:305).

The data provided by the parents were analysed to determine whether the programme had contributed to an improved parent-child interaction. The following responses were provided by the parents in this regard:

The opportunity to interact with their children in the programme, was described by some parents as *'amazing'* (P1), *'the highlight'* (P2), *'I think we enjoyed it more than the children'* (P6), *'the best part of it all'* (P7) and *'together, us alone, quality time'* (P11).

Several parents commented that the interaction with their children was the strongest feature of the programme. Here are some of the comments:

- P2: *'And when we got to do the activities, that was the highlight. For every child and every parent, I'm sure. You start to learn who your child is as well going through the activities.'*
- P4: *'We were actually thinking about can't we make it till two o'clock. Because the fun and what you learn there, they're actually eager to learn more.'*
- P5: *'But for you to see how your kid's face lights up when he does something and he's proud of it, that's something that I enjoyed as well. I enjoyed myself to see my son, 'Daddy, look what I did, daddy, look I did this ...' It's interacting with the kids. Doing things with them that makes it satisfying at the end of the day ... Because at the end of the day it's supposed to be parents and children interacting together.'*
- P7: *'But the best part of it all is interaction with your child. Just seeing my daughter happy, interacting.'*

- P8: *'I enjoyed the ...the parent and child being together, those things singing and sharing with the child, because for me it was about the child.'*

Although the parents indicated that the interaction during the programme was enjoyable, it was important to determine whether this interaction extended into the homes and lives of the parents and Grade R learners, otherwise it would have been of little benefit. The following was found:

- As mentioned, P1 indicated that he and his son still played snakes and ladders every evening and that they sing and dance to music. *'We did things [in the programme] that we still do every night.'* The fact that this boy has such a close relationship with his father, probably shielded him somewhat from the detrimental effect of the abuse that he and his father suffer through the mother's actions.
- P2: *'You start to learn who your child is as well, going through the activities. You realise that okay, my child is shy, or sometimes he's not sure of himself, or something like that. So you do actually get to learn about your child.'*
- P3: *'Now it's different. I learned that you, even if you are a busy mom, you can give your kids two hours. It makes a difference in your life. Every day if you give them two hours, to be with them, listen to them, play with them, ask them what they want.'*
- P8: *'It was about the child, what the parent and child could do together. And then at home we also do it ... I enjoyed the ...the parent and child being together, those things, singing and sharing with the child, because for me it was about the child. W... also enjoyed it ... and he showed the people at home.'*
- P9: *'The physical contact that one has with one's child, that was the best. It means a lot to them, because she will still come to me and say, 'Mommy I love you.'* This mother mentioned later that she and her Grade R daughter still have regular physical contact, they play hopscotch, and when the daughter takes out the faces chart, they talk about feelings.
- P11: *'The programme taught me to control my temper and also to spend more time with my children ... there I realized once again that to spend time with one's children makes things so much better. Much better. Then one learns to understand that child and why they sometimes do the things that they do. It gave me much more understanding in terms of the upbringing of the child.'* This father said later that, no matter how busy he is, he will always listen to his Grade R son when the latter wants to sing him a song.

It was evident that all the parents seem much more aware of the importance of positive interaction with their Grade R's, spending quality time, and doing fun things together.

#### 6.3.6.3 Home learning environment

The importance of a home learning environment to promote the development of school readiness skills, was also confirmed in literature. Such a home learning environment would be print rich and

include activities such as reading to children, providing books, drawing materials, songs and games. Creating a home learning environment promotes the following domains of school readiness:

- Cognitive development (Jackson & Needham, 2014:39; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2013:187; Fantuzzo, McWayne, Perry & Childs, 2004:474);
- Pre-literacy (Dove, *et al.*, 2015:174; Ngwaru, 2012:34; Smith, *et al.*, 2011:421; Bracken & Fishel, 2008:45; Machet & Pretorius, 2003:40; Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998:848; Lara-Cinisomo, *et al.*, 2004:14; Farver, *et al.*, 2006:207);
- Pre-numeracy (Lukie, *et al.*, 2014:257);
- Self-regulation (Baker, 2013:184; Calkins & Williford, 2009:186; Fantuzzo, *et al.*, 2004:474);
- Approaches to learning (Baker & Rimm-Kaufman, 2014:730; Baker, *et al.*, 2012:847);
- Prosocial behaviour (Brownell, *et al.*, 2013:n.p.);
- Self-efficacy (Schunk & Pajares, 2001: 4-5).

According to Kaplan and Owens (2004:75) parents' involvement in home based educational activities conveys the message to children that education is valued and important.

It needs to be remembered that the parents who attended the programme, do not necessarily have the means to buy books and other educational resources. That is one of the factors that make the difference when children are raised in a low socio-economic environment. However, not all the parents had financial constraints, but they needed to be made aware of the importance of a home learning environment. The following data with regards to providing a home learning environment were provided by the parents:

- P1 *'We use the dices of the snakes and ladders to teach him to add.'*
- P2 mentioned that they do all the activities at home and it is easy and fun. She even shares with the ECD class that she attends every week the activities that she learns at the programme.
- P4 responded: *'Now since we had those classes, she liked colouring in. She would not sit with papers before. Many of the copies that you gave us, I made copies of that and now she colours in. Now she calls the friend from next door and they the two of them play 'teacher-teacher' and so she will colour in and talk and try to make a story of the picture. We still use much of the little books and stuff that you gave us.'*
- P6 gave much information: *'Like the drawing. The colouring in. And distinguishing between objects on the papers ... So I still show him the things. Like the drawings, nature. And then, I read to him ... I have it in a book. I can take it out anytime. Interesting stuff ... So I helped him with that reading. I said you need to know their names. ... at home he counts up to a hundred on the chart. But then she [the educator] said to me the last time, he could only count to 39... But, I believe he will eventually progress. He will. Because it's not that I'm*

*neglecting in any way, and even my family when he's there, I always say to him, 'Listen, go and do this tonight just for five minutes.'*

- P7 said: *'... when they [the Grade R daughter and her friend] sit with books, they sit and they colour, and then she comes and show me, 'Mommy, we did this picture, we did this now,' or she takes some beads and stuff and then they 'sommer' make stuff for them.'* This mother remarked how much her daughter had enjoyed the sessions: *'But she was actually enthusiastic to do these things. She was more excited than me because she woke me up in the morning. Come mommy. Then its six o'clock. We need to go to school... (Do you read to her?) When I do get time then I sit. Or she brings me a book, just some book. 'Mommy, come let's read.'* Earlier during the interview the mother remarked: *'At home L loves to do the buttons. But she does it in a counting manner. She counts the buttons, or the holes, how many holes are there.'*
- P10: *'Yes, I read it to him (the stories), and he sits still, but there's also other children coming here, so I tell them they must sit there on the bed and then I read it to them. And they sit still.'*
- P8: *'Playing snakes and ladders and W... showed his aunties to make masks, but anyway, he (the older brother) will draw pictures and W... will cut out. Their auntie shows them to apply the glitter without spilling and how to design. We let the grandfather join the library and the aunties read to the children starting with W... so they read quite a bit.'*
- P9: *'Yes, and afterwards ... she likes cutting. She made herself another mask at home. This mother also helps her daughter with 'homework'.*
- Parent 12: *'At the back of the picture that they have to colour in, then I read to him the picture, I read the message to him, then I help him to colour in.'*
- P13 also had much to say on this topic: *'I have a book at home for Grade 1, it is for example 1 + 1 and so, then I copy from the book and ask her to fill in the answers. Then she fills it in ...I give her more, I go through her books, I say to her, 'D..., come mommy read to you and then you tell mommy what was the story about.' I took out library books for her ... And she says I must sing to her before she goes to sleep.'*

Three parents mentioned that they play music and dance with their children, which also contribute to a home learning environment.

One parent who was not one of those interviewed, came to the researcher during the programme and remarked that, since the stories were included in the information pack, she read to her Grade R child a story every evening. Another mother remarked that her daughter asked repeatedly: *'When are we going to that place where we get the stories?'*

It needs to be kept in mind that some of these parents might themselves not be familiar with books, numeracy and literacy, and not all of them seemed to stimulate their Grade R's intentionally with educational activities. However, it seemed as if the majority of parents had become more aware of the value of creating reading opportunities for their children and stimulating their development on a cognitive level. This should make a difference in the Grade R learners' school readiness.

## **PARENTAL WELL-BEING**

The importance of parents feeling positive about themselves, especially parents who live in challenging circumstances is sometimes overlooked. Throughout the programme the researcher remarked that some of the topics were not only for the benefit of the Grade R's, but for everybody, for example dealing with feelings and thinking positively. One session was dedicated to parental wellness and included two short hand-outs on a healthy lifestyle and positive self-talk. The parents could also watch two short motivational videos. Some parents took the information to heart and apply it to their lives. The following short remarks pertaining to parental wellbeing was shared during the interviews:

P1 said he does a lot of positive talking to himself.

P3 found value in the session about self-image. *'Actually when you were teaching the sections that touched me, actually which really, really made a big impact was the first section, love and self-image ... Self-image, when you know who you [are] ... because to me I didn't know who I am also. But when you taught about the self-image you have got the right to say no to this, you have got the right to say yes to this.'*

P4 took a holistic view and nurtures herself physically, emotionally and cognitively.

P5 *'What have I learnt? Well, you learn a bit of everything. Self-motivation, social development, ...'*

P6 (a nurse) found much value in several topics, especially positive self-talk. She verbalized the fact that parents who feel good about themselves, can convey the positivity to their children. She said the following: *'If you feel good about yourself, they will also feel good about themselves. And as a parent, like I say, when I started applying the self-talk, it helped a lot ... I cannot go to work without saying to myself that I'm confident enough in my job ... The self-talk became very important to me after this session, because I realised I need to do that before I leave the house, because you don't know what's happening and waiting on you in the ward. It was easier to teach him (her Grade R son) self-esteem, and then I could apply it to myself as well. Self-talk became a very important aspect in my life ... I have so much more energy. I actually took that for myself more than I applied it to him. It starts with me first. So it helped me a lot, more than all the other lessons that we've had, in the parent wellness self-talk, it has helped me a lot.'*

P9 had this to say: *'Yes, I have benefitted. I am a very shy person and now I have more self-confidence. Thank you very much for all that you have done for us. I appreciate it.'*

P7 summed it up: *'... it needs to be included'* (the wellness topic). *'We as parents need to know that we also need ...'* (Interviewer: Nurturing?) *'Yes we do.'*

## **DISCUSSION**

The data provided by the parents indicate that the parenting skills programme reached its aim of improving parenting skills to enhance the school readiness of Grade R learners in resource poor communities. The following emerged from the data:

- Parents do have the capacity to change their parenting behaviour when they are made aware of their children's developmental needs
- The principles on which the programme was based, contributed much to the success of the programme. These were, including the parents with their children in the activities, using a strengths based approach, providing much fun and jolly activities in the programme and attending to the parents' emotional needs as well. These features motivated the parents to complete the parenting skills programme and contributed to their personal growth, which makes them better and more confident parents. As the one parent commented: *'If you feel good about yourself, they will also feel good about themselves'*.
- The aspects in which parents improved were not related to school readiness only. These are parenting behaviours that are characteristic of any good parenting that contribute to healthy child development and positive outcomes with regards to all aspects of children's functioning. All parenting programmes should include these components.
- Working with parents who parent under difficult socio-economic conditions demands much patience and understanding. Any parenting programme should include topics and activities to build resilience and provide some fun and relief from the problems that parents face. This parenting programme included music and dancing/movements at the beginning of each session and it was heartening to see how the parents enjoyed it.

The emerging importance of early child development and school readiness has led to the formulation of several pieces of legislation to make provision for service provision for this age group. Policy statements accentuating the vital importance of a positive early childhood development include the National Integrated Plan for Early Childhood Development in South Africa (2005), Guidelines for Early Childhood Development Services (DSD:2006), the Department of Education's White Paper on Early Childhood Development (2001) as well as the White Paper on Families in SA (DSD, 2013). These documents call for a commitment to improve service delivery to this age group. Sections 143 & 144 of the Children's Act (2005) and the White Paper on Families (DSD, 2012:37-39) make extensive provision for the delivery of prevention and early intervention services to parents to ensure a safe and healthy home

environment for children and responsible parenting. This provides a strong mandate for social service professionals to render services to the parents of children in need.

In the light of the poverty and unemployment in South Africa, the high dropout rate in school and the high prevalence of social problems in so many communities, drastic measures need to be taken to improve the situation. Healthy early child development and school readiness lay the foundation for later prosperity, not only for individuals, but also for a country as a whole. In this regards, social workers should be on the forefront of driving solutions to these overwhelming problems.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In the light of the findings of this research, the following recommendations are made:

### **Promoting early childhood development and school readiness**

School readiness appears to be an issue of such importance for individuals as well as for South Africa's economy and prosperity, that it is imperative to make provision for funds and widespread programmes to promote early childhood development and school readiness. The widespread poverty in South Africa demands that programmes and resources be allocated to enhance early childhood development and school readiness. This can be done in the following ways:

- The provisions in the White Paper on Families (2013) and the mandate given to social workers in the Children's Act (2005) need to be utilized to do early intervention with families and to develop innovative ways to reach vulnerable families before they become part of the welfare system of necessity. It is easier and more cost effective to focus on early prevention than to try and 'fix' a situation later on (Centre on the Developing Child of Harvard University, 2011) The benefits in terms of economic and human capital of investing in early childhood development far outweigh the cost (Heckman, 2012:50).
- Comprehensive parenting support programmes to strengthen family life and enhance parenting skills need to be developed. These programmes need to be normalized and separated from the stigma of being welfare clients and be accessible in all communities. Proper funding will enable social workers to present well developed programmes and also offer incentives for attending.
- Parenting programmes need to address the fundamental emotional needs of children that parents are most suited to fulfill. The need for a nurturing, supportive parent-child relationship, especially for persons in socio-economic difficulty, was mentioned time

and again in literature. Parenting programmes should ideally contain activities that are aimed at parents in conveying the skills of building a relationship and of interacting with their children.

- In the context of school readiness the importance of creating a home learning environment for children was also accentuated. All parenting programmes aimed at improving early childhood development need to address this important aspect. Parents can be supported to use what their environment offers to stimulate their children without having to buy expensive resources. The authors are aware of the fact that the first author's colleagues in learning support do parenting groups where they teach parents these skills. However, social workers have access to many more parents who are not accessible in the formal school system and these activities can be used to enhance parenting in any parenting programme.
- Awareness programmes targeting the parents of babies from the time of birth and presented in facilities such as clinics and hospitals will create awareness with parents of the role they play in their children's early development and the developmental milestones that must be reached. For illiterate parents, these awareness programmes can be in the form of non-verbal teaching materials with drawings to illustrate principles and facts. This will address the fact that child development from the time of birth plays a role in school readiness.
- With regards to the parenting skills programme, there are many implementation possibilities. The sequence of sessions can be changed to suit the needs of specific groups. Although it is recommended that the activities be retained, the content of the topic handouts can be simplified to include less elements or the focus could be on only one concept. The programme can also be developed to be more accessible to parents who are illiterate. In the case of indigenous cultures, some aspects, such as acceptable social norms, need to be adapted to the specific culture of a target population

## **CONCLUSION**

The extent of the crisis in basic and higher education, poverty and continuous inequality in South Africa demands serious multi-disciplinary cooperation to do research and policy development on a large scale to address deficits in early childhood development leading to school readiness. Strategic and operational planning needs to take place on both national and local levels, and it should be supported by legislation. The importance of parenting in the development of school readiness as well as the urgency to develop new and innovative ways to address the quality of parenting in resource poor communities emerged from this study. University curricula need to be

adapted to equip social workers in schools and in communities to work intensively with parents in practical ways. Cooperation from other disciplines, including education, psychology, health and occupational therapy must be encouraged, because in an education crisis of this magnitude, there is no room for professional possessiveness. Services need to be properly funded, community based and accessible to parents without the accompanying stigmatization of being a social work client.

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