

## Chapter 2

### Exploring existing literature as background to the study

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#### 2.1 TRANSITIONS BETWEEN GRADE R, GRADE 1 AND GRADE 2

##### 2.1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 2 reports on the literature review that I conducted about all of the central constructs of this study, namely *transition*, *individuals within a township*, *Grade R*, *Grade 1* and *Grade 2*, including the supplementary variables in the study, namely *stress*, *stressors*, *life skills* and *coping*. In what follows below, I examine, describe and discuss all of these concepts in depth, while making reference to the relevant studies in which these themes are contained. The chapter concludes with the conceptual framework upon which this study was based.

##### 2.1.2 TRANSITION IN GENERAL

*“Young children will not learn properly until they have made a secure transition to nursery or school”* (Fisher, 2003:55).

Although Dunlop and Fabian (2007:6) argue strongly that there is no single definition for the concept of transition, transition can be defined in educational terms as the process of moving from one life-changing situation to another. This process is often accompanied by a movement from one specific phase of education to another. Fabian and Dunlop (2007:33), describes transition as the different moves<sup>3</sup> that children experience. Bronfenbrenner (1979:26) speaks about an *ecological transition* and defines it as what happens when one’s position in the environment changes because of a transformation in one’s role, one’s setting, or both. Bronfenbrenner (1979:27) also uses the term *educational transition* when he refers to what happens when children enter an educational institution. During such an educational transition, the child’s family serves as the primary developmental context whereas the school serves as the secondary developmental context. It is

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<sup>3</sup> *Moves* refer to the time between settling in and the first visit, a long-term physical move from one locality to another, a change of teacher(s) in a school year, and to the change of a group of children who move into or out of a particular class (Dunlop & Fabian, 2007:34).

within this developmental context that issues of *adjustment*, *identity changes*, *role changes*, and *relation changes*, are all of primary importance.

Dunlop and Fabian (2007:13) elaborate on their definition of transition as a complex process in which individuals are involved in continuous social activities which become the arena in which they attempt to adapt themselves to the challenges of the new social conditions that they encounter. Griebel (2000:23) refer to transition as “a complex field of theory and research” because it describes the radical changes to which an individual must adapt as he or she grapples with the challenges presented by the transition. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) argue that it is not events themselves that constitute a transition, but rather the manner in which an individual demonstrates how he or she *cope*s with such events. Within the framework of the current study, I made the assumption that whatever life skills the individuals within a township might acquire during their Grade R year, could serve them as vitally important coping skills for the purpose of making their transitions from Grade R to Grade 2.

For the purpose of this study, I also concur with the views of Dunlop and Fabian (2007:13) when they note that a transition is often erroneously conceptualised by researchers as a once-off process that only happens on the first day on which individuals find themselves within the new situation. Since children in reality often go through many different transitional stages during a particular academic year, it contributes nothing of value or interest to define *transition* as comprising those events that occur only on the day when children arrive in their new classroom at the beginning of a particular educational year. It is the opinion of Bruner (1996) that it makes more sense to assume that the totality of one particular annual transition is made up of a number of constituent transitional stages, each of which may be vitally important to the development of a child's confidence and maturity. One may observe, for example, that any particular environment's characteristics imply predetermined shared values, beliefs and traditions that are already present in the educational and social environment when the child arrives on the first day of the school year.

For the purposes of this study, I have assumed that the individuals within a township's school environments in Grade R, Grade 1 and Grade 2, all serve as the

main environment in which various transitions take place even as the family continues to serve as the primary developmental context for these individuals. Other role players who are present in these environments include the children themselves, their teachers, parents, their new friends, and their existing friendships.

Dockett and Perry (2008:275) make reference to the National Education Goals Panel (1997) in the United States tripartite definition (child-school-community) when they discuss school readiness. They take this stance because they argue that it is not only the attributes of readiness that are important in children, but that the school's readiness to receive children as well as the family and community's ability to support children are all of importance for making an effective and smooth transition. During the course of their study, they reached the conclusion that it is also the responsibility of schools and communities to assist a child to make an effective transition to each new grade, and that one cannot place the onus of making an effective transition solely on the children themselves and on their ability to change and adapt to new or difficult situations (Dockett & Perry, 2008:275).

Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews and Kienhuis (2010:3) also provide substantial evidence in their study that the transition of children to primary school is not only important for the children themselves, but also for their parents. It is for this reason that they conclude that the parents of such children all need that kind of information and skill in life management techniques that will enable them to help their children to make effective transitions. In this study, however, I focused primarily on the children.

It was one of my assumptions that the school in particular, which includes both teachers and the headmaster, play a crucial role in the transition process. I also assumed that the teachers' attitudes and their sensitivity to the children's emotions and their backgrounds, would make an impact on each of the children in their care. The corollary of this assumption is that it is therefore necessary for teachers to know as much as possible about each of the children in their classes even before the commencement of the school year. My further assumption was therefore that it is important for teachers to treat children primarily as individuals rather than merely as members of a group.

Margetts (2002:105) is of the opinion that a child's adjustment to school depends on a combination of background as well as personal factors. Because of the variability of these factors, the nature of the transition process may fluctuate between children, schools and communities. I concur with Margetts's (2002:105) observation that every individual transition process may be different, and that there may be as many transition processes as there are children, schools and communities. I therefore accepted as a further assumption that one of the greatest challenges when assisting children to make transitions is the necessity of acquiring a deep and thorough appreciation of the diversity of the children themselves, and of their schools and communities.

Grové (1981:11) draws attention to the importance of the role of parents during a child's transition process as well as the school's responsibility for a child's development during his or her transition to school. Irvine and Stewart (2008:11) argue that if children are to thrive from the very beginning of their school careers, the responsibility for their well-being depends more on their parents than on the children themselves. Since I also concur with the assertions of Irvine and Stewart about the secondary importance of the role of parents in a successful transition to primary school, I made the assumption that parents do not play a more important role than the children themselves in making a uncomplicated transition. In spite of this, I accepted, for the purposes of this study, that parents do in fact play a vital role in influencing the attitudes of their children and securing their well-being during this crucially important period in their lives.

Pluckrose (1994:9) also emphasizes the role that the school and community play during the transition process as well as in the first year of a child's school career:

*They are going to enter a place where their knowledge and understanding is to be deepened and extended. What do we need to know about these new members of our school community? How can we build upon what they know already? What do they need of us – as individuals and as a group?* (Pluckrose, 1994:9).

A successful transition to school may strengthen the possibility that children will experience positive social, emotional and academic outcomes during their time in school (Hirst *et al.*, 2011:5). Cassidy (2005:147) noted a number of the most

important factors that Grade 1 teachers identified for making a successful transition from pre-school to primary school as well the successful transfer of information from pre-schools. The experience of the teachers in that study provided evidence that personal visits by teachers to the pre-schools, so that the children could meet their future primary school teacher and so that the teacher could meet the children, exerted an enormously beneficial influence on the subsequent development of the children.

This finding was made somewhat equivocal by the fact that different teachers visited the pre-schools for different reasons. Some of them visited the children with the intention of getting to know them while others used this opportunity to discuss the problems and difficulties that the children themselves raised (Cassidy, 2005:148). The importance of children being able to transfer useful information from their pre-schools was an issue of deep concern for many of the respondents in this study. The reason for this, they indicated, was because they themselves had very few and limited opportunities for becoming familiar with the children, their abilities and interests (Cassidy, 2005:149). These respondents were also of the opinion that the ability of children to adapt to the new school situation is heavily influenced by their self-esteem, their confidence in their ability to behave appropriately in school, their mastery of social skills, and their ability to take responsibility for their personal belongings. The respondents also agreed that the ability of a child to comply with rules and to adapt to a teacher's expectations were vitally important predictors of a smooth transition (Cassidy, 2005:150).

In order to emphasize how challenging the transition to school is for a child, whether the transition be to kindergarten or to a primary school, I referred to the study conducted by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000:505), which set out to obtain "an ecological perspective" on kindergarten transitions. These researchers concluded that the entry to formal schooling forms part of every school during a child's developmental process, and that it is characterised by tensions between stability and change and between the ability to adjust to new challenges and to maintain the usefulness and security that are provided by established patterns and habits. It is for this reason that social support is particularly important for children during this period in their lives. For the purposes of this study, I explored the various forms of social

support that were present or absent during the two transitions of individuals within a township from Grade R to Grade 2.

### **2.1.3 FACTORS THAT MAKE THE TRANSITION PERIOD MORE EFFECTIVE**

In the study undertaken by Dockett and Perry (2003), the researchers concluded that the most significant factors that influenced the transition to school included knowledge, ideas, facts, and an understanding on the part of the children of a few important concepts. They also included factors such as the ability of the children to adjust themselves socially to the school context, their ability to interact with a large group of children, and the efficiency of their motor skills (such as their ability to tie their own shoe laces and hold their pencils correctly). Other significant factors which they examined included the attitudes of the children towards their school as well as their ability to follow rules. They also took note of the physical attributes of the children (including their age and general health), together with any family issues the children had about the interaction of their families with the school and any important changes that had occurred within their families (Dockett & Perry, 2003:30). The final factors which they examined included the characteristics of the educational environment as an influential factor that affected the transition of the children to their new school (Dockett & Perry, 2003:31).

A study conducted by Early *et al.* (2001:199) makes reference to *the ready school movement*. Adherents of this movement shifted their attention away from the children's readiness for school and concentrate rather on the schools' readiness for children – all of which is in accordance with the recommendations of the National Education Goals Panel (1998, in Early *et al.*, 2001:199). A “ready” schools' main concern is how best to create meaningful links between families, preschools, and the communities in which they find themselves (Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999, in Early *et al.*, 2001). By following this method, they examined the connection between the children's families, their schools, the communities in which they lived, and the children's experiences of their first day of school.

Throughout this study, I made the same assumptions as those of the ready school movement. This was in line with my other assumption (mentioned above) that the better informed teachers were about every individual in their class, the better would

be the outcome of the transition period. I remained aware that the sheer size of classes for which teachers were responsible militated against the possibility that any single teacher would be able to get to know every child in his or her class intimately. I nevertheless maintained my assumption that if children were given the opportunity to visit their future schools and classrooms and make the acquaintance of their teacher before the beginning of the following school year, this connection would play an important part in mitigating the anxiety that children feel when they are compelled to move into unfamiliar settings. But in spite of my assumption in this regard and my belief in the recommendations of the ready school movement, I continued to assume that the children themselves make the most important contribution to the success or otherwise of whatever transitions they make. My position throughout this study was therefore that the individual child, the school, and the parents are all equally indispensable and necessary for successful and uncomplicated transitions. It follows from this that I assumed that it was not the school alone that was the single most important role player in the transition process, but that child, the parents, and the school, all acting in concert, could be analysed in terms of the functions and responsibilities that were appropriate to each of them.

Laverick (2008:321) mentions four key components that contribute to the appropriate support of young children who are starting out in school. Laverick's research included a consideration of the developmental characteristics of young children, the recognition of those factors that affect adjustment to new situations, the importance of establishing relationships with the families of children, and the implementation of strategies which assist children in making this transition a smooth transition. Although Laverick mentions these four components in the context of providing appropriate support for children who are starting school, I also emphasised that these four components were important for helping children directly to effect successful transitions.

I also assume that other factors such the teachers awareness of the developmental characteristics of the children in his or her care, the maintenance of a friendly environment, the capacity of children to make new friends, and the ability of children to adjust to the demands of their new classroom, all played an important role in making the transition experience less stressful. I also assumed that the existence of a healthy relationship between parents and teachers, characterised by good

communication and mutual respect, would be helpful during this period. Finally, I made the assumption that a teacher who is engaged in implementing specific strategies to help children to make their transitions, would be of great value. I agreed with the statement made by Loizou (2011:53) that teachers need to allocate children with whatever amounts of space and time they need to feel part of their new situations and the environments in which they find themselves.

In a Finnish study by Ahtola, Silinskas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Niemi and Nurmi (2011), the researchers investigated whether or not the existing transitional practices that participating teachers were implementing in their preschool-elementary schools, contributed to children's academic development in Grade 1. Their main focus in this study was how to implement effective school-level policies that would compensate for the evident discontinuities between elementary school grades and primary school (Ahtola *et al.*, 2011:295). The four existing kinds of transitional practices in their study included:

- the organisation of activities in which both children and teachers from preschools and primary schools would participate.
- the passing on of useful information to future school entrants.
- an in-depth look at whether the curricula of pre-primary and primary schools had been adequately compiled and revised by both the pre-primary and primary school staff.
- the provision of opportunities for families to meet the primary and pre-primary staff who would teach their children in the following year.

They concluded that if school transitions were to be successful, it would be necessary to pay due attention to the establishment of meaningful relationships between the children concerned, their families, and the primary and pre-primary schools in which the children would enrol in the following year (Ahtola *et al.*, 2011:301).

My main purpose in this study was not to examine, analyse, or reach conclusions about the adequacy or otherwise of the participants *academic* development in each of these grades. My focus was rather on an in-depth exploration of the adequacy of the communication that took place and the relationships that were established



between the primary and pre-primary schools, the participants, and their respective families.

Li, Mak, Chan, Chu, Lee and Lam (2012:5) investigated the effectiveness of a play-integrated programme that was designed to enhance a smooth transition for children from preschool to primary school. The two contributions of this programme were to devise activities that would help the children concerned to become familiar with primary school life, and the construction of play activities that would enhance the children's problem solving skills, their interpersonal communication skills, their ability to express their emotions in an appropriate way, and to assist children to improve their stress-coping techniques. Their results demonstrated how the children in the experimental group experienced greater happiness in their transitional periods, how they encountered fewer difficulties in making the necessary psychological adjustments, and how they had fewer worries than the corresponding children in the control group. Because of their success in achieving their goals, the researchers concluded that their play-integrated programme was effective in facilitating a smooth transition for the children to primary school.

Throughout the study I also supported the conclusions reached by Li *et al.* (2012:5) with regard to the two main recommendations about how to familiarise children with what would be expected of them in their primary schools and how children could be taught the skills they needed to make their present and future transitions more effective and less disturbing.

Loizou (2011:54) argues in his study that although transition programs and activities are effective in easing the ways in which children assimilate new experiences between preschool to Grade 1, children also need to be empowered to voice their needs during the transitional process and to be presented with opportunities for reconfiguring, where necessary, their existing culture and identity. He maintains that if this is done, one might expect productive and appropriate outcomes from the programs that they recommend, which begin at school.

Hemmeter, Ostrosky and Fox (2006:583) argue in their study that having the ability to develop satisfying social relationships, to communicate one's emotions effectively, and to engage in constructive problem solving, are all vitally important

skills that young children will need if they hope to make successful transitions during their school careers.

Hanley, Heal, Tiger and Ingvarsson (2007:295) concluded from the evidence they gained in their study that the preparation of preschool children for any possible social complications that they might experience in their transition from kindergarten to primary school, is probably the most important task for all early childhood teachers. While I fully support this conclusion on the part of Hanley *et al.* (2007:295), I would add (in line with what I have stated above) that it is not only the responsibility of the children's early childhood teachers, but also that of their primary school teachers and parents, to prepare children in whatever ways are necessary for the success of their future educational transitions.

The strategies which I recommend in the study for successful transitions between Grade R and Grade 2, include certain life skills. Although it is my contention that most individuals learn better in practice rather than from theory, I strongly believe that it is possible for people to prepare themselves to cope with specific difficulties and problems by learning certain life skills in advance. In this context of this study, this means that one should be able to prepare children in advance to make successful transitions from Grade R to Grade 2. For the purpose of this study, I identified techniques for the achievement of self-knowledge and personal identity as the skills that would best serve the interests of the participating children. When people have an accurate understanding of who they really are as well as an accurate knowledge of both their strong and weak points, they will have a strong advantage over others in terms of their sense of belonging and their self-confidence as they face the challenges of making difficult transitions. Healthy self-esteem also enables individuals to feel more confident and competent in new, threatening and uncertain environments. Coping strategies that enable an individual to exercise emotional self-control may also help such individuals face difficult situations without breaking down or resorting to inappropriate emotional displays.

In order to cope with stressors such as bullying and intimidation, self-confidence, self-respect and coping skills are indispensable for defusing challenging situations. I also assumed throughout this study that important life skills for making the transitions from Grade R to Grade 2 would include those life skills that enable a

person to develop a sound sense of belonging, confidence, control and self-respect, as well as practical ways of coping with prevalent stressors. Although some individuals may struggle to exercise such life skills even after they have been taught to do so, it is my belief that, with the right attitude, practice and motivation, most individuals of average skills would be able to use such life skills to defuse challenging situations and, in the case of the individuals within a township, it would enable them to experience smooth transitions from Grade R to Grade 2.

Margetts (2002:106) makes the assumption that the transition to school, and the way in which children adjust to what they find in that school, may be easier for children when they are already familiar with certain situations, when the channels of communication are open, when parents are properly informed about the new school, and when teachers are familiar with the developmental needs of the children they teach as well as any relevant previous experiences of such children. Broström (2002:52) argues that one of the most important needs of children during their transition to school is to feel comfortable in their new school environment. This would mean in effect that a child should feel a sense of well-being in addition to the realisation that he or she *belongs* in the school environment. Brooker (2008:12) conceptualises a successful transition as that which happens when a child feels competent, strong and able to handle new experiences with confidence and appropriate initiatives.

For the purposes of this study, I concur with the description by Brooker (2008:14) of the specific needs that children have during these transitional periods. I went out of my way to explore, analyse and describe these needs of the children in my study by utilising various research tools and devices. Such needs included the necessity for children to have an adequate sense of self-worth, a positive sense of identity, and the need for them to live within a matrix of supportive personal relationships. I examined the role the trusted adults and familiar peers played in the lives of these children. I noticed that once the children had acquired a clear understanding of the rules and routines that prevailed in the school, and when they enjoyed good communication with their teacher, they also displayed a sense of personal control and purpose. The ability of the children in the study to make the right choices and sound decisions and to control their emotions, also made the transition process much easier for them. Paige-Smith and Craft (2010:71) argue that it may be

possible for children to develop healthy self-esteem and proper self-confidence if they are given the right kinds of support.

In order to facilitate children's successful transition and adjustment so school, Von Suchodoletz, Trommsdorff, Heikamp, Wieber and Gollwitzer (2009:565) concluded in their study of the role of behaviour regulation in kindergarten, that the use of behaviour regulation skills may become universally necessary if teachers want to effect the successful transition of children into the school milieu. The findings of Ahtola *et al.* (2011:7) suggest that, to promote successful school transitions, the relationships among children, families, pre-school and elementary schools, should be improved through the exercise of appropriate transition practices. Transition practices may however create new problems because what may be helpful for one child in a specific context, may not be appropriate for another child in a different context. But for the purposes of this study, I support the above-mentioned practices because they may facilitate less stressful transitions for children between Grade R and Grade 2, provided that a strong emphasis is placed upon the necessity for maintaining healthy communications between the school administrators, teachers, parents and children.

#### **2.1.4 CHALLENGES CHILDREN MIGHT EXPERIENCE DURING TRANSITION**

In South Africa, Grade R was instituted by the National Department of Education for the purpose of preparing children for the more structured and formal activities of Grade 1. Although Grade R is more playful and informal than Grade 1, the structure of Grade R activities does help to prepare children for what they will find in Grade 1. Unfortunately, however, there is still a substantial number of schools in South Africa that have no Grade R facilities for classes, with the result that a large number of children in this country do not obtain the advantages of having attended a Grade R class. In the South African Governments' News Paper of 2 August 2010, there was an article that stated that, between 2003 and 2008, the percentage of Grade 1 children who received pre-primary schooling, had increased from 60% to 80%. Goal 11 of the Department of Education's Action Plan to 2014, entitled "Towards the realization of schooling 2025", is *to improve the access of children to quality early childhood development below Grade 1*. The Department of Education has also indicated that it is their intention to ensure that all children who will be in Grade 1 in

2015 will be able to enrol in a Grade R class in 2014. My concern about this is that although the Department of Education places a strong emphasis on the importance of literacy and numeracy in their statement, they made no reference to the importance of life skills, which I believe to be as important as literacy and numeracy.

Another difficulty that arises during the transition process are problems associated with attachment. According to a study by Seven (2010:347), the attachment representation and social behaviours of children were concurrent with their adaptation during their transition from preschool to primary school. Seven (2010:348) notes in his study that stable peer relationships facilitate school adaptation. His findings provide evidence to show that adaptive problems during grade one were caused by insecure attachment and social behaviours. Another interesting result was that the children who were closely observed during the course of this study displayed the *same* behaviours in both pre and-primary school. His initial report was that children who were secure in their attachment, adapted more successfully to school – in contrast to what happened in the case of insecure children. Seven (2010:353) therefore concluded that secure attachment is a significant variable in school adaptation.

For the purpose of this study, I will explore the relationships between the participants and their parents, and correlate them with the ambient environmental factors and social resources (as is shown in the conceptual framework for this study) so that I will be in a position to answer my research question and provide a rich and detailed description of the relationships I observed during the course of this study.

#### **2.1.5 SCHOOL READINESS**

*“Readiness for school is an ongoing process, not a specific point that is reached”*  
(Woolfson, 2004:88).

Scott-Little, Kagan and Frelow (2006:163) define the term *school readiness* in their study as particular sets of skills and knowledge that contribute to children’s later success in school. Thompson and Raikes (2007:24) define school readiness not only as a product of cognitive and linguistic preparation, but as the corollary of social

skills, the ability to cooperate, self-confidence, self-regulatory competencies, and socio-emotional qualities. They also note that school readiness may include the inherent characteristics of a child as well as the influence of the child's most important relationships and the social context of his or her early development.

In their discussion of challenges that attend the transition from preschool to school, Irvine and Stewart (2008:14) note that a child's security can be easily shaken and for this reason they may feel anxious and nervous. They argue that this happens when the normal, everyday disruptions of life at school and home become the cause of fears. It is in such circumstances, they argue, that even minor problems can become a cause of disorientation because of ignorance and unpreparedness of the children. I support the contention of Davin and Van Staden (2005:4) when they argue that school readiness is difficult to measure or define for the following two reasons. Firstly, different researchers and scholars have proposed widely divergent definitions of school readiness, and, secondly, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to assess the impact that a child's parents and other significant adults make on a child's development and his or her school readiness (however it may be defined). Grové (1981:10) defines school readiness as the condition in which the child finds himself or herself when he or she is able to cope with the formal demands of school because of his/her maturity, his/her social maturity, and also his/her emotional maturity – three aspects of school readiness that Grové (1981) regards as indispensable. Bub (2009:25) concludes her study into the effects of classroom support on children's social and behavioural skills during transition points, by noting that school readiness involves the preparation of children's minds, emotions, social capacities, and personalities to cope with whatever they will encounter during transitions and during their new school year.

For the purposes of this study, I agree with the findings of Bub (2009:25) that it may be helpful to prepare children's minds. I understand the statement to mean that it is helpful to help them to deal with their thoughts and emotions, and that it is necessary for adults to listen to them and to provide them with the skills that they will need to exercise control over their emotions and take advantage of their best social capabilities. In short, I understand it to mean that it is desirable to teach children beneficial socializing skills and norms of acceptable social behaviour. But I am also of the opinion that it may be difficult, if not impossible, to effect any helpful

changes in a child's *personality* with the intention of making him or her better able to cope with the kind of experiences that children encounter in school. I have also assumed throughout this study that different personalities may need different kinds of preparation for the transition periods, with the result that it becomes necessary to focus on children as individuals rather than as groups.

Olsen and DeBoise (2007:47) argue in their study that a child's social, emotional and behavioural development may exert a significant effect on school readiness. Webster-Stratton and Reid (2004:96) postulate in their study that emotional control, behaviour control, and the formation of healthy friendships, are all necessary prerequisites for school readiness and for academic success.

Roberts, Lim, Doyle and Anderson (2011:117) observe in their study that emotional well-being and social competence are indispensable conditions for a successful transition from kindergarten to primary school. In their study, Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani and Merali (2006:3) argue that there is an inseparable link between school readiness and the success or otherwise of a transition. In order to undertake a smooth transition, children must be *ready* for school, and, equally importantly, schools must be *ready* for the children that they admit. In addition to this, it is important to note that the readiness of parents should also be part of the process. Davin and Van Staden (2005:5) point out that some authorities have labelled the above-mentioned definition as unsatisfactory because it places a strong emphasis on the readiness of the *school* and not the possibilities inherent in individual children. They regard school readiness as a fixed state, a notion that is highly problematic.

The *readiness to learn* instead of *readiness for school* offers an alternative way of approaching this phenomenon. In the context of the two definitions, namely school readiness versus readiness to learn, I have assumed that the term school readiness is still the best operational definition because while school readiness includes a concern with the fitness of an individual school, it also pays close attention to the fitness and preparedness of the child. Although this definition includes the term *school* as its key concept, I do not feel that it excludes the developmental and emotional maturity of the child.

The definition provided by Davin and Van Staden (2005:5) of *readiness to learn* regards this concept as reflecting that stage of development when an individual is able to understand and grasp the specific concepts and skills that are necessary if a child of a particular age is to cope successfully with transitions and then the difficulties inherent in them. This definition also takes account of a child's ability to pay attention and concentrate, a child's intellectual ability, a child's motivation to learn, a child's health, a child's emotional maturity, and the domestic and community environment in which the child lives. According to Davin and Van Staden (2005:5), all these factors are important in assessing readiness to learn. Strong motivation, self-belief, listening skills, friendliness and self-reliance are also regarded by Woolfson (2004:89) as important personal qualities for school readiness.

For the purposes of this study, I concur with the opinions of Davin and Van Staden (2005) and Woolfson (2004) because they support a holistic view of all the most necessary and important factors in school readiness. Readiness to learn therefore is a complex and multilayered concept that is not susceptible to an easy definition. Although I kept all of the above-mentioned concepts in mind during the course of the study, I chose to make use of the term *school readiness* as I pursued the research preparatory to answering the research question.

#### **2.1.6 THE APPROPRIATE TIME FOR A CHILD TO BE ENROLLED FOR PRIMARY SCHOOL**

*“Their emotional, intellectual, social and physical growth is personal, and their experience of life egocentric. The attempt therefore to classify children by their age alone is full of pitfalls”* (Pluckrose, 1994:8).

It is obvious from Pluckrose's statement above (1994:9) that he feels strongly that age should not be the determining factor for every school entry permission. He also notes that most children are about five or six years old when they enter primary school for the first time. Scott-Little *et al.* (2006:163) note that a child's chronological age is still linked to a child's school readiness in most parts of the world. They also point out that some states of the United States have eligibility age/birth cut-off points for kindergarten. They note that the concept of school readiness as constituting a set of *skills*, has received an immense amount of attention from teachers. Berne



(2003:30) also emphasizes that *emotional readiness* is more important for school readiness than mere physical readiness.

For the purposes of my study, I have assumed that emotional readiness, physical readiness, and social and intellectual readiness preparatory to starting school are all equally important and that they all exert a reciprocal effect on one another. In addition to that I further assumed that emotional readiness, physical readiness, social and intellectual readiness are all necessary conditions for an individual who is starting school although they will obviously further develop all these skills and states during the years to come. It is my assumption that these four components are interconnected and equally important. I have also made the assumption throughout this study that some of these skills and conditions will be emphasised and that others will be neglected in accordance with an individual's background and preferences, the influence of the child's parents and other significant adults in the child's life, as well as other intrinsic factors.

In the United Kingdom, children are enrolled for formal school at the age of five. In Norway, the age of school entry was recently reduced from seven to six years of age. German, French and Italian children are enrolled in school for the first time at the age of six. In the United States, grade school begins when the child is six years old, and kindergarten is still optional in some of states (Brooker, 2008:26).

Griffen and Harvey (1995) found that 80% of principals and teachers were of the opinion that younger children were disadvantaged in comparison to older children when they started school at the same time. The preferred age of the commencement of formal education recommended by the majority of principals and teachers was at least five years of age. According to the teachers who participated in this study, children who entered school at an older age had been given additional time to mature emotionally and socially. Both of these factors are of importance in fostering the kind of self-esteem and confidence that children need to cope with the demands of school and to feel good about themselves.

For the purposes of this study, I am of the opinion that children should not be able to be enrolled in a school at an age that is earlier than that recommended by the participating teachers in the study undertaken by Griffen and Harvey (1995), who

emphasise that school readiness should be predicated upon *emotional maturity*. I am therefore in total agreement with the recommendations of the Department of Education with regard to the age at which a child will be admitted to school in South Africa. This means that a child in South Africa will start school (in Grade 1) in the same year in which he/she turns seven. I do, however, acknowledge that it is possible to make exceptions for children to attend school either one year earlier or one year later. It is my opinion that these decisions are also personal, and that it is up to the parents and teachers who know the child to decide what is in the best interest of the child concerned.

## **2.2 INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A TWINSHIP**

*“The goal of raising twins is to bring each of them to mature adulthood, [so that they are] capable of making independent decisions that affect their lives... Without learning the necessary skills during the formative years for making their own choices, they become emotionally incapable of functioning independently”*

(Rosemary *et al.*, 1978:76).

### **2.2.1 DEFINITIONS AND BACKGROUND**

According to Prindle Fierro (2010:1), the most recent data about twin birth rates for 2008 in the United States of America was 32.6 twin births per 1000 of single-child births. Although this number has more than doubled since 1980, it has remained moderately stable in the years since 2008. One of the reasons for this may be that there has been a huge increase in the number of *in vitro* fertilizations performed in the past few years. Segal (1999), states that twin studies have demonstrated that, when it comes to intelligence and personality characteristics (introversion, sociability and temperament) and cognitive capacity, these characteristics are strongly affected by genetic predispositions. Research into physical characteristics such as height, weight, and propensity to disease, have also shown the overwhelming influence of genetic predisposition (Klein, 2003:4). While I am in agreement with Segal (1999) that intelligence and personality characteristics, cognitive capacity, and physical characteristics, are all strongly influenced by genetic predisposition, I am also of the opinion that an individual's environment, parenting and the resources in his/her environment, also play a crucial role in that child's overall and specific development.

### 2.2.2 CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES TOWARDS INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A TWINSHIP

The twin researcher, Marjorie Leonard (in Friedrich & Rowland, 1984:267), calls the most common and frequent reactions and responses to individuals within a twinship a “cultural sugar-coating”. She bases this observation on the way in which people in Western culture tend to react towards individuals within a twinship. The comments that people make when they encounter such individuals within a twinship for the first time are usually sentimental and condescending (although, no doubt, mostly well meaning), and they may include phrases such as, “Oh, how lovely”, “What fun” or “How sweet they are”. Some ‘myths’ about individuals within a twinship include the assumption made by some people that because individuals within a twinship are often regarded as one unit, it amounts to an exception to the rules when it becomes obvious that individuals within a twinship might have opposite as well as complementary characteristics. Individuals may also entertain an expectation that identical individuals within a twinship are physically and mentally similar or even identical, that they are best friends and that all can communicate telepathically (Clegg & Woollett, 1982:267). My personal attitude towards individuals within a twinship is that they are two individuals who together make a twinship. For the purpose of this study, I have only included monozygotic individuals within a twinship, and I will provide an in-depth description below of how they themselves and certain role players in the lives of the individuals within a twinship perceive them. These role players include the individuals within a twinship themselves, their mother, and their Grade R, Grade 1, and Grade 2 teachers.

### 2.2.3 BONDING BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A TWINSHIP

*“Twinship is the closest of all human relationships. Exceeding the bond of mother and child” (Rosemary et al., 1978:3).*

Friedrich and Rowland (1984:268) points out that because individuals within a twinship usually spend 24 hours a day in the company of a co-individual within a twinship throughout their early childhood, their relationship is of an exceptionally special nature. Klein (2003:1) also mention that because individuals within a twinship share their early life experiences, this creates a special kind of intimacy between them. She also notes that this primary bonding experience creates

exclusive as well as distinct developmental stages for infants and young individuals within a twinship, stages that robustly affect their later development. The exceptional bonding attachments that they form with one another create unique strengths and distinct limitations for each individual within a twinship. Friedrich and Rowland (1984:271) further note that the closeness of individuals within a twinships' relationships may be strongly influenced by the uniqueness of the individuality of each of the individuals within a twinship. Rosemary *et al.* (1978:3) also observe that individuals within a twinship don't need a lot of encouragement to remain close to one another because they are already so dependent on one another. Klein (2003:1) makes reference to the connectedness, trust, and understanding between individuals within a twinship. It is hardly therefore surprising that they enjoy each other's company, and that they tend to long for close and intense personal relationships because connections of this kind constituted their initial and primary experiences in life. For the purpose of this study, I am in agreement with Rosemary *et al.* (1978:3) when they noted that individuals within a twinship spontaneously form a close connection and bond, especially in their early years. My own point of view, however, is that a strong bond and connection of this kind cannot be regarded as a given, and that it may be quite possible for some individuals within a twinship to go their separate ways independently of one another.

#### **2.2.4 INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A TWINSHIP AS INDIVIDUALS**

*Some small individuals within a twinship may occasionally wonder if they are a complete person or half of a whole" (Friederich & Rowland, 1984:284).*

While individuals within a twinship obviously have the same rights as single children to fulfil their own potential and to become individuals, this may be more difficult for individuals within a twinship than it is for single children. During their early stages of development, the individuals within a twinship have to learn to differentiate themselves from their mother as well as from one another (Friederich & Rowland, 1984:281). For the purpose of this study I agree with the views expressed by Friederich and Rowland (1984:282) when they say that it might not be easy at an early stage of development for an individual within a twinship to be able to make the distinction between "my twinship" to "myself" (Friederich & Rowland, 1984:282). As individuals within a twinship get older, they sometimes share a joint identity which

enables one individual within a twinship to become upset or unhappy on behalf of both of them. This kind of confusion of identities may even persist into adulthood (Friederich & Rowland, 1984:283).

Esther Goshen-Gottestein, in Frederich and Rowland (1984:284), suggests in her work on individuals within a twinship in Israel, that it is more problematic and difficult for individuals within a twinship or for multiple children to identify with their mother (the first step that people take to their own identity) because it is necessary for a mother to divide her attention between the individuals within a twinship. Goshen-Gottestein add that the mothers of multiple children sometimes perceive the individuals within a twinship as though they were one complete personality. According to Frederich and Rowland (1984:284), it takes individuals within a twinship much longer to establish their individuality and to realise that they are in fact separate from one another. For the purposes of this study, I agree with Goshen-Gottesetin that it may be more difficult and problematic for individuals within a twinship to establish their own personal individuality and identity. I would add to this that the way in which their parents actually perceive individuals within a twinship (whether as a unit or as individuals within a unit), is a deciding factor in helping these individuals within a twinship to identify and establish his or her own unique individuality and identity.

Types of individuals within a twinship that have the most difficulty in establishing separate identities are same-sex, look-alike fraternal or identical individuals within a twinship. Rosemary *et al.* (1978:3) also mention that their individuality grows outwards from within, and that it exerts an effect on most areas of these children's lives from infancy to adulthood. They also note that the attitude of their parents as well as factors in their home environment shape the children's personalities to a large extent. For the purposes of this study, I agree with Rosemary *et al.* (1978) when they say that the attitude of the parents and the home environment exert a significant impact on the shaping of each child's personality:

*"If the twins are thought of and treated as a unit, they will think of themselves as only halves of a whole and act accordingly"* (Rosemary *et al.*, 1978:4).

## 2.2.5 THE INFLUENCE THAT EACH OF THE INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A TWINSHIP EXERT ON ONE ANOTHER

Friedrich and Rowland (1984:295) note that some observers attach a great importance to the details of the birth process, and that they make use of these details to assign roles and even distinctive characteristics to the individuals within a twinship. Although they do for supposedly humorous reasons, some individuals within a twinship may later appropriate these roles and characteristics as their own. Some of these stories may include habitual sayings such as “You won the fight to get out first”, or “She was patient and let you go first”. In spite of this, the most significant single influence on an individual within a twinship environment is probably the influence exerted by his/her co-individual within a twinship. It is highly unlikely, for obvious reasons, that during their pre-school years, either of the individuals within a twinship will spend more time with anyone else than with his/her co-individual within a twinship. Friedrich and Rowland (1984:288) found that although either of them will sometimes want to be with and do the same thing as his/her co-individual within a twinship, they will more frequently want to do things that show that they are different from their co-individual within a twinship. It is nevertheless my own belief that individuals within a twinship do exercise important and significant influences upon one another. While some of these influences may be positive, others may be negative. They include learning from one another to competing with one another and supporting one another in various situations. For the purposes of this study, I find myself in agreement with Cooper (2004:204) who argues that most positive aspects of being an individual within a twinship are affection, cooperation, encouragement, sympathy, empathy, understanding, stimulation, and mutual support.

A Norwegian study referred to by Friedrich and Rowland (1984:289) confirms that the temperaments of fraternal individuals within a twinship are far less alike than those of single brothers and sisters. They also note that fraternal individuals within a twinship are less alike than any two children who have been picked at random from a control group. This tendency for individuals within a twinship to polarize and to pull apart from the co-individual within a twinship is a strategy that they use to develop and to establish individual identities for themselves.

Friedrich and Rowland (1984:290) observed that individuals within a twinship may polarize in their behaviour, temperament and interests from an early age. Some examples of such polarisation include the movement away from introversion to extraversion, from being well-behaved to misbehaving, from being quiet to being boisterous and noisy, and from being tidy to being untidy. My personal belief is that individual temperaments are mostly unchangeable, whether one exists as an individual within a twinship or not.

The characteristic role that an individual within a twinship adopts in the pair, is most probably a reflection of that individual's natural inclinations, preferences, and abilities. Even so, it is quite possible that one or both of the individuals within a twinship will limit their full potential during their development. The reason why this happens is that one of the individuals believes that the other individual within a twinship is dominant in a particular area of achievement or behaviour (Friedrich & Rowland, 1984:290). I assume that the role that an individual within a twinship adopts may vary during the years as the individuals mature. I also believe that the individuals within a twinship may adopt several roles during their life span.

“Opting out” is a term that is often used in discussions about the behaviours of individuals within a twinship. Friedrich and Rowland (1984:292) define the term “opting out” as what happens when one individual within a twinship feels that he or she cannot compete with the co-individual within a twinship. Because of this belief, and in order to avoid failure, he or she may abandon any attempt at all to participate in that area of behaviour or endeavour. Such a pattern of behaviour may persist for as long as the individuals within a twinship remain together. Opting out is further described by Friedrich and Rowland (1984:294) as a result of unfavourable comparisons, which often exist within the mind of an individual within a twinship when there is no feedback or validation from the outside world. Since individuals within a twinship have a much closer object with whom to compare themselves than other children do, it is more common for individuals within a twinship to be hypersensitive about small differences between them – even though some of these differences may be distorted out of all proportion.

## 2.2.6 CHALLENGES OF BEING AN INDIVIDUAL WITHIN A TWINSHIP

Klein (2003:2) mentions that apart from all the delightful experiences that individuals within a twinship share, there are also challenges and difficulties. Among such challenges are the inability to set limits for other people and the complexities attendant upon being alone. Individuals within a twinship sometimes experience fear when they are not together with their co-individual within a twinship. They may also strive to make great efforts to achieve intimacy with others if the co-individual within a twinship is not present. This kind of behaviour may impede the psychological development of each of the individuals within a twinship. Another challenge that may arise for individuals within a twinship is the lack of communication. This is caused by the fact that because they are together for significant periods of time, they may demonstrate little or no need to communicate often with others, including their parents. They may also experience shame or guilt and even some confusion when they find themselves at the centre of attention because they are simply not accustomed to being alone in the spotlight. Klein (2003:9), Malmstrom and Poland (1999), and Pearlman and Ganon (2000) have observed that the public image that the individuals within a twinship share, as well as their early bond, are distinct challenges that single children do not have to cope with. Klein (2003:12) argues that the perceived lack of motivational, intellectual and emotional capacity to verbalize their shared relationship with new people, that is observed in some individuals within a twinship, occurs because individuals within a twinship are in one another's presence most of the time. They may therefore form a habit of not wanting to explain themselves to others.

Cooper (2004:204) also makes reference to dominance or dependence, competition, collusion, and exclusivity as possible challenges for individuals within a twinship. It is my personal belief that the challenges of being part of a twinship are in fact quite real. Even so, appropriate support at the right time, healthy relationships with people other than the co-individual within a twinship, a matter-of-fact and uncomplicated attitude towards being part of a twinship, and a commitment on the part of each individual within a twinship to establishing his or her own identity, may all be helpful in assisting these individuals to meet such challenges without undue stress or complications. For the purposes of this study, I am in agreement with Klein (2003) and Cooper (2004) when they assert that being part of a twinship is



challenging in various ways and to different degrees for all individuals within a township. They also make the assumption that one cannot make generalisations about these challenges and the effect they have because every township is unique and because the individuals within any particular township experience those challenges in unique ways.

### **2.2.7 THE WAY IN WHICH INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A TOWNSHIP SEPARATE FROM ONE ANOTHER IN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

Friedrich and Rowland (1984:310) are of the opinion that one of the main advantages of being individuals within a township is that they begin school in the same class, and that they therefore may suffer from fewer anxieties than single children, especially if they enrol in a school where they do not know anyone. On the issue of whether individuals within a township should be separated or not, Taal (2000:107) argues that because individuals within a township nearly always have a strong bond with one another, separating them might produce undesirable consequences. It is the opinion of Taal (2000:108) that when individuals within a township are starting school, that might not be the best time to separate them because of all the changes and adjustments that they already have to cope with. It stands to reason that if one has one's co-individual within a township in the same class, that might be a source of strength and security that makes the necessary adjustments to a new school easier. Klein (2003:20) is of the opinion that when individuals within a township have received good parenting, they will be able to separate from each other more naturally at the right time, and that they will also be able to tolerate and assimilate such a separation more easily when they are separated for the first time as older children or even as adults. It is my belief that while being in the same learning environment may be beneficial for some individuals within a township, it may not necessarily be beneficial for others. I also make the assumption (already mentioned above) that one should treat every township as a unique phenomenon and examine it in all its ramifications before one makes any decision about whether or not to separate the individuals within a township in their learning environment.

Apart from the advantages noted above, there may also be disadvantages to being a member of a township. One of these disadvantages is that both or either of the individuals within a township may restrict or otherwise inhibit one another's

behaviour, either consciously or unconsciously. Such behaviour patterns may inhibit one of the individuals within a twinship (or even both) from participating fully in some important area of school life if they are kept together (Friedrich & Rowland, 1984:311). Some close fraternal individuals within a twinship may not be able to manage or cope adequately with the difficulties involved in separation from their individual within a twinship at this early age of their lives (Rosemary *et al.*, 1978:80). In a study undertaken by DiLalla and Mullineaux (2008:124), the researchers found that when individuals within a twinship were separated from their co-individual within a twinship at school, there were more complaints from parents and teachers about difficulties with peers.

When individuals within a twinship rely too much on the dynamics of their twinship to make friends or to attract attention, this may exert an inhibitory effect on the development of their individual personalities and the coping strategies they require to deal with the outside world (Friedrich & Rowland, 1984:279). In the same way as their constant togetherness may inhibit individual development, it may also make it more difficult to separate them at a later stage (Friedrich & Rowland, 1984:280). In a study by Segal (2006:473) that focused on whether individuals within a twinship should be in separate classrooms or not, the researcher noted that while some individuals within a twinship may suffer unnecessarily during a transition without their parents and without their co-individual within a twinship, single children were only suffering from being separated only from their parent(s). Other teachers are of the opinion that individuals within a twinship will struggle to develop as individuals if they are not separated from one another. When one individual within a twinship is especially dependent on the other individual within a twinship when it comes to making decisions or when one of the individuals within a twinship does all the talking, then it may be appropriate to separate them. Similarly, when one individual within a twinship is dominant and he or she outshines the other individual within a twinship, it may also be appropriate to separate them (Taal, 2000:109).

In his study, Segal (1999) found that monozygotic individuals within a twinship stayed together more frequently than dizygotic individuals within a twinship. Although monozygotic individuals within a twinship might not be together on a regular basis, it usually gave them enough satisfaction merely to be in the company of their co-individual within a twinship. Webbink, Hay and Visscher (2007:573)

argued in their study regarding the cognitive abilities of individuals within a twinship who were in the same class, that the advantages of sharing are that it puts them in a position to feel more confident in the company of their co-individual in a twinship. The advantages of being in separate classes might be that individuals within a twinship have opportunities to develop independently of one another and thus become less competitive towards one another. Van Leeuwen, Van den Berg, Van Beijsterveldt and Boomsma (2005:390) concluded from the evidence of their study on the effects of individuals within a twinship being separated in primary school that there is no discernible advantages and disadvantages that accrue to a twinship whether they are together in the same class or whether they are separated. But they do nevertheless recommend that the *parents* of the individuals within a twinship should decide what is best for the individuals within a twinship and for themselves.

For the purposes of this study, I agree with Leeuwen *et al.* (2005) about the desirability of separating individuals within a twinship in the learning environment. My point of view (already mentioned above) is that every individual within a twinship pair is unique and different, and that different factors must be taken into consideration before deciding on whether or not individuals within a twinship should be placed in the same classroom or in different classrooms in their schools.

## 2.3 STRESS

*“There is abundant evidence to support the notion that if [it] not controlled, stress in modern society is a most serious threat to the well-being of man. Of course, the most important factor in such control is man himself”* (Humphrey, 2004:9).

### 2.3.1 DEFINITIONS

Oxington (2005:i) defines stress as a person’s response to an unwanted situation. Humphrey (2004:2) offers the following general definition of the stress when he notes that it is “a constraining force or influence”. A definition offered by Selye (1975, in Humphrey, 2004:2), which I also included in my master’s study, is that “stress is a non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it”. In other words, stress represents the changes that occur in the human body in response to a stressor or stimulus that mobilises the body's resources. Humphrey (2004:2) notes

that the reaction to a stressor may include a variety of physical as well as chemical changes, and that stress sometimes evokes a level of anxiety that exceeds the ability of the human being suffering from stress to contain. Since stress manifests both internally and externally, this makes adaptation difficult in those cases where a huge amount of increased effort is required by the human being concerned to maintain a satisfactory state of equilibrium between him or her and the external environment. An essential argument to remember is that stress is not an agent that produces these states mentioned above. Stress is rather the state that a person is in because of the agents or stressors experienced (Humphrey, 2004:3). Zeitlin and Williamson (1994:12) clarifies this by noting that stress is a *reaction* and that the stressors are the *events* or conditions that evoke the reaction.

I do not find myself in agreement with Oxingtons' (2005:i) definition of stress for the purposes of this study because my position is that stress occurs not only as a result of the intrusion of unwanted situations, but that, in some instances, stress may occur in desirable situations as well when a person is flooded by positive or pleasurable stressors.

I expanded my definitions of stress since the time of my master's research. I now regard stress in a much more in-depth and holistic manner, and I concur with the views of Lazarus (1999:37) when he asserts that stress, emotion and coping are all intricately linked phenomena. It is therefore also my own assumption that stress, emotion and coping are all integrally linked with one another during any stressful experience.

### **2.3.2 THE CLASSIFICATION OF DIFFERENT KINDS OF STRESS**

Humphrey (2004:12) quotes Selye's comment that "stress is the spice of life". When one bears this in mind, it becomes obvious that stress can also be a desirable and positive experience (desirable stress), as opposed to a negative and unwarranted experience (undesirable stress or devastating stress). Humphrey (2004:12) also notes that Selye came to the conclusion that stress is a normal state and that it is impossible for human beings to avoid different kinds of stress because it is something intrinsic to human life.

Lazarus (1999:32) notes that Selye (1974) defines two kinds of stress, namely *eustress* and *distress*. Eustress is the constructive kind of stress that is associated with the emotions of empathy and positive striving. Such stress is compatible with good health. Distress by contrast is destructive, and because it frequently manifests as anger and aggression, it may damage human health. The well-known psychologists Poshner and Leitner, mentioned in Humphrey (2004:12), that the predictability and controllability of variables play important roles in the kind of stress we will experience. I agree with Poshner and Leitner about the fact that predictability and controllability are important variables in stressful situations. I also make the assumption that it is important to include considerations about stress in this study because the transition of individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2, will inevitably evoke certain kinds of stress.

According to Humphrey (2004:14), there are two kinds of stress: emergency stress (which involves some kind of bodily injury) and continued stress (which involves more complex bodily reactions). While psychological stress may be evoked when a person predicts or imagines some emergency or threatening situation, any explanation of social stress (which includes evoked by social interactions) serves to confirm that individuals make an impact upon society and that society also influences individuals (Humphrey, 2004:15).

For the purposes of this study, I find myself in agreement with the definition of Selye's (1974) when he says that both eustress and distress may be dealt with in either a constructive or destructive manner. It is my belief that one's personal background and life experiences and personal choices all influence the way that individuals deal with various kinds of stress, even when some of the reactions seem merely to be impulsive. But my assumption throughout the study is that all individuals make personal decisions and choices about how they will deal with stress, and that continuous practice and effort are required of individuals if they hope to be able to deal with stress constructively. In this study I explored how the participants dealt either constructively or destructively with their stress during the transitions that they made from Grade R through to Grade 2, and the reasons for their behaviour in those situations.

### **2.3.3 STRESS, EMOTION AND COPING**

Lazarus (1999:37) is of the opinion that stress, emotion and coping need to be observed and described as they occur in their relationships with one another. Since stress, emotion and coping always occur in conjunction with one another, it is imperative to examine them as they operate in concert. Within this triad, emotion acts as the superordinate component because it subsumes both stress and coping. Saarni (1999:vii) argues that emotion represents the animating processes of life and that emotion is present in every individual's experience of daily existence. I concur with the definition of Saarni (1999:vii) in this regard, and agree that emotion may be characterised as a manifestation of the energy and vibrancy of life. *Life skills*, which are sometimes conceptualised as coping, play an important role in the purpose of this study, and I will elaborate on them later in this chapter.

### **2.3.4 THE CAUSES OF SCHOOL-RELATED STRESS AMONG CHILDREN**

Humphrey (2004:17) describes certain stressful experiences that are common to children. Between the ages of five and six, stressful experiences for children include being enrolled in school for the first time and not knowing what do in a classroom. For children between the ages of seven and eight, failure, being unpopular with other children, and the necessity to complete homework satisfactorily, are all common stressors. For the purposes of this study, I will elaborate on specific school-related stress experiences that affected the participants.

### **2.3.5 SCHOOL STRESS**

#### **2.3.5.1 The stressfulness of having to adjust to school**

The entry by children into first grade is regarded by Humphrey (2004:71) as one of the most severe and stressful life events that they have ever experienced. Markham (1990:62) points out the large amount of psychological research that affirms that some of the most stressful periods in a child's life are in fact associated with school. Schultz and Heuchert (1983:17) note that the transition to school is stressful to some degree for all children and that the teacher is the central figure in the mediation of this stressful situation. Markham (1990:62), observes that stress may peak in a child's life when he or she is enrolled in school for the first time, when he

or she changes schools, during examinations, and at the onset and development of puberty. Other stressful features of school life may include excessive and unrealistic expectations of performance, bullying, learning difficulties, or *superior* intellectual abilities on the part of the child. For the purposes of this study, I have also assumed that the attitudes of the parent(s) to the transition to school might exert a significant influence (either positive or negative) on how well an individual child manages the transition.

#### **2.3.5.2 Indicators of stress**

Saunders and Remsberg (1987:25) feel that when children experience too little stress in their lives, they will become indifferent, irritated, discontented, and vulnerable to passing infections and illnesses. Too much stress, by contrast, may make children petulant, emotionally over-stimulated, fatigued, confused, and also at greater risk of becoming ill. When children experience more or less the most optimal amount of stress, they should feel contented, motivated, enthusiastic, and energetic.

#### **2.3.5.3 Stressful school experiences**

Goleman (1996) has argued that emotional distress can hamper and obstruct the intellectual abilities of children with the result that their capacity to learn effectively becomes inhibited. Goleman (1996) states that when a child experiences fear and stress, the flow of information that they need for responses and the solution of problems that arise in class may be obstructed and that this may be a cause of future failures.

Bahman and Maffini (2008:36) lists some school-related stressors as being low grades, challenging classroom settings, athletic requirements, peer relationships, clashes with teachers, and examinations. They also mention that when a child experiences high levels of stress, it becomes difficult for optimal learning to take place. Bahman and Maffini (2008:3) also made mention of Shonkoff's (2007) observation that when a child is facing a prospectively threatening situation such as the first day of school, it immediately becomes necessary for a child to find a way to cope.

For the purposes of this study, I concur with the views of Shonkoff (2007) that it is essential for a child to find coping strategies for stressful situations. I therefore explored as many different appropriate coping strategies which I viewed as important for the individuals within a township during their transitions from Grade R through to Grade 2.

In my own master' research (Prozesky, 2005), I identified a number of school-related stressors that were identified as stressful experiences by Grade 1 learners. The greatest positive stressor that was identified by the learners was their teacher. These learners expected the teacher to exhibit a warm and positive attitude towards them, and when this was forthcoming, it was greatly appreciated by the learners. They also preferred teachers to maintain a calm and disciplined atmosphere in their classroom (Prozesky, 2005:102). The Grade 1 learners in this particular school also demonstrated a great need to learn whatever was appropriate for them. Their main goal for Grade 1 was to pass and to continue through to Grade 2 in the following year. Friendship was also regarded by these learners as a positive stressor. Although having a best friend was not specifically mentioned by any of the learners, most of them wanted to enjoy the company of a friend during break times. None of them wished to be alone during break times. While the need to make friends at the beginning of the year was stressful for some of the participants in the study, for others it was easily achievable (Prozesky, 2005:103).

Negative stressors identified by the participants in the study included a chaotic atmosphere and excessive noise levels in the classroom. These learners were adverse to these two conditions because it made it difficult for them to concentrate and so to complete the work that had been set for them, and, secondly, because it upset the teacher. Bullies were also regarded as negative stressors, especially in the playground and especially when they came from among the Grade 1 learners themselves. Being laughed at or being teased were also regarded as bullying by the learners (Prozesky, 2005:103). The last negative stressor mentioned in this study was a diffuse fear of the older children. According to the Grade 1 participants, some of the older children in this school would steal the food and money of the Grade 1 learners and even pinch and punch them (Prozesky, 2005:104).



## 2.4 LIFE SKILLS AND RELATED TERMINOLOGY

Within the current literature that I reviewed, I identified certain constant phrases and themes as relevant to *life skills*. These themes included terms such as *emotional intelligence*, *emotional education*, *socio-emotional competence*, *socio-emotional effectiveness*, *emotional literacy* and *social competence* (Bar-On, 1997; Cefai & Cooper, 2009; Haggerty Sherrod, Garmezy & Rutter, 1996; Huges, Thompson & Terrell, 2009; Ciarrochi, Forgas & Mayer 2006). All of the above-mentioned authors made reference to the necessity for mastering certain coping skills, understanding one's emotions, and the ability to express and regulate one's feelings so that one would be able to enjoy a healthy and constructive life.

According to Bar-On (1997:3), *emotional intelligence* may be defined as “an array of personal, emotional, and social competencies and skills that influence one's ability to succeed in coping with environmental demands and pressures”. Cefai and Cooper (2009:17) used the blanket term *emotional education* to define the process by which children develop *emotional competence* through the development of social learning processes. They use the term *emotional intelligence* because it implies a broader and more inclusive definition than terms such as *emotional intelligence*, *emotional literacy*, *social learning*, *emotional learning*, and *social competence*. The term *emotional education* also enables us to focus on the multi-factorial nature of learning because it includes the biological, emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of learning.

Mosley (2009, in Cefai & Cooper, 2009:119), refers to *socio-emotional competence*, a complex term that refers to *emotional literacy* and various social skills. But they also prefer the term *socio-emotional effectiveness*, which was described by Ciarrochi *et al.* (2006:265) in the following quotation:

*“A combination of emotional intellect, social effectiveness, and, perhaps, emotional intelligence itself might be represented by the term socio-emotional effectiveness – an individual's capacity to navigate the social world in an effective manner, accomplishing his or her goals as needed.”*

Huges *et al.* (2009:323) argues that when a child is *emotionally literate*, he or she will be able to recognize, understand, label, express, and regulate his or her

feelings. They refer to these five categories as the RULER – the five components of *emotional literacy*.

Haggerty *et al.*, (1996:275) made reference to the term *social competence*, which may be regarded as those *life skills* that assist human beings to adapt to a variety of different ecologies and settings. When an individual possesses *social competence*, he or she will be able to integrate affect, cognition and certain behaviours into the holism of his or her life and thus accomplish specific social tasks and achieve desirable development outcomes.

In my understanding, *emotional intelligence*, *emotional education*, *socio-emotional competence*, *socio-emotional effectiveness*, *emotional literacy* and *social competence* are all subdivisions of the concept *life skills*. I further assume that each of the above-mentioned terms are subsumed in the more comprehensive term *life skills*. *Life skills* may thus, for example, enhance the participants' *emotional intelligence* and their *socio-emotional competence*. It is also evident that low levels of *emotional intelligence* and *socio-emotional competence* on the part of the participants may directly affect how quickly and effectively (or otherwise) participants might learn, grasp and apply the *life skills* that are described in this study.

But so that I would be in a position to answer my research questions, I did not focus primarily on *emotional intelligence*, *emotional education*, *socio-emotional competence*, *socio-emotional effectiveness*, *emotional literacy* and *social competence*. Although I kept all of these concepts in mind, I focused instead on the concept of *life skills*.

My goal was therefore not to measure the participants' *emotional intelligence* or attempt to understand whether or not they were *socio-emotionally competent* or *effective*. Instead I focused more narrowly on the transitions that the individuals within a township made from Grade R through to Grade 2. My understanding was that if the participants were taught *life skills* that were appropriate in their situation, this may also increase the participants' levels of *emotional intelligence*, *emotional education*, *socio-emotional competence*, *socio-emotional effectiveness*, *emotional literacy* and *social competence*. I therefore abstained from making an in-depth

investigation of these concepts and was instead satisfied with providing explanations of my opinions about *life skills* and the current literature in the field.

#### 2.4.1 LIFE SKILLS

*“All learning has an emotional base”* (Plato, in Baham & Maffini, 2008:1).

Goudas, Dermitzaki, Leondari and Danish (2006) adopted the definition of Danish and Nellen (1997) that defines life skills as physical, behavioural or cognitive life skills. A definition of Life Orientation as a learning area in the Revised National Curriculum Statement for Grades R-9 (2006:26), includes a learning area which encompasses the development of skills, knowledge, values as well as attitudes. It also empowers learners to make informed decisions about health promotion, social development, personal development, physical development and their overall orientation to the world of work. Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:50) define *life skills* as skills that help human beings to adapt to changes, to cope with difficulties and to confront conflicts or crises in an effective manner. In the context of the current study, I preferred to adopt the assumption of Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:50) that while everyone is capable of becoming proficient in *life skills*, such *life skills* are largely acquired and learned. I therefore made the assumption that the participants in this study were capable of acquiring the necessary life skills through a learning process.

For the purposes of this study, I agreed with Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:57) that the term *life skills* is more or less self-explanatory, and that such skills are essential for any individual who wishes to cope independently and competently with the daily activities and transitions in the environments in which they find themselves. Rooth (1995:2) described *life skills* as being necessary skills for optimal learning and for the conduct of a successful life. *Life skills* also serve as coping skills, which enhance the quality of human life.

In their definition of life skills, Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:59) have included learning skills, basic skills, listening and verbal skills, adaptability, self-regulation (interpersonal), self-regulation (intrapersonal), group effectiveness, influential skills, and survival skills. For the purposes of this research, I adopted four of the above-

mentioned skills as relevant to my study. These particular life skills are adaptability, self-regulation (intrapersonal and interpersonal), and group effectiveness skills. All these skills are summarized in the following table:

**Table 2.1: Fields of life skills** (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006:59)

Adaptation skills	Interpersonal self-regulation skills	Intrapersonal self-regulating skills	Group effectiveness skills
Behaviour: The ability to adapt appropriately to changing circumstances Decision making Interpersonal relationships	Self-understanding Self-worth Self-confidence A positive self-concept A positive attitude Personal strong and weak points Integrity Morals and values Goal-setting and motivation Emotional control	Responsibility Patience Independence An ability to cope with conflict anger, frustration and feelings	Social relationships Group relationships Cooperation skills Participation skills Group work Concerns for others Family and friendship skills

A thorough description of *life skills* by Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:61) includes what they call assets,<sup>4</sup> those personal qualities, talents and characteristics that an individual uses on a daily basis, and those abilities that are necessary for successful learning. It also encompasses coping skills, meaningful interactions with others, specific behaviour that result in achievements, and the specific ways in which people deal successfully with their problems and life experiences. Finally, *life skills* include those skills that enable people to perform whatever it is that they wish to do. Life skills also vary in accordance with the developmental stages of the person who is practising them and in dependence on the changes that occur in a human being's life situations.

Ebersöhn (1999:42) makes the assumption in her study that the mastery of certain *life skills* are necessary for all human beings, at every age and at all stages of human development. I concurred with this statement for the purposes of this study and therefore also assumed that it was necessary for the participants to learn and

<sup>4</sup> The capacity, instinct, strength or natural gifts every human being has (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006:61).

master specific life skills at the age and stage at which they found themselves for the duration of this study.

Ebersöhn (1999:17) argues in her study that the ability to recognise and describe emotions accurately is the first step towards the acquisition of *life skills*. Since an individual's thoughts make a direct impact on how that person feels in a specific situation and how that person will react in a particular situation, Ebersöhn (1999:18) argued that *life skills* are concerned with that domain of behaviour in which individuals react effectively or ineffectively. I agreed with Ebersöhn (1999) that it is by means of life skills that a person may be encouraged to behave more constructively and pay proper attention to those of his or her thoughts, emotions and behaviour that are important for effective living.

For the purpose of this study, I adopted Ebersöhn and Eloff's (2006:54) *phases of skill acquisition*, and utilised it with the participants during my facilitation of their *life skills*. Although I shall now offer a brief explanation of these phases, I will deal with them in more depth, and will at the same time discuss the methodology of this study in Chapter 3. According to Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006), every person who acquires a particular life skill will have to pass through the distinct phases of awareness, motivation and analysis, and follow this up with practice, revision and the application of the skill concerned in actual practice.

#### **2.4.2 LIFE SKILLS DURING THE SCHOOL YEARS**

*“Children need momentous practice in order for them to develop skills”*

(Bahman & Maffini, 2008:31).

Samanci (2010:147) argues in his study that one of the most important aims of primary education is to help children to adapt healthily and skilfully to social life. Skills that are necessary for adapting to social life include understanding other people, acting according to the demands of particular social environments, making friends, displaying acceptable behaviours were necessary, expressing oneself, dealing with problems, and establishing a good relationship with one's environment. Apart from these skills, Samanci (2010:147) asserts that there are four factors that play an important role during the process of developing primary school children's

social skills. These factors are the school itself, the children's family, their environment, and their personal characteristics. I am in agreement with the conclusion reached by Samanci (2010:147) with regard to the importance of these four factors during the acquisition and development of social skills. I used the four factors described by Samanci (2010:147) throughout the study, and explored them in the context of the participants' lives. More specifically, I investigated the individuals within a township in their family setting, their environment, and their school, and I set out to understand as best I could how their personal characteristics affected the process of acquiring the life skills they needed for the transitions they made from Grade R through to Grade 2.

Bilmes (2004:4) maintains that there are six important life skills that children need to develop in order to negotiate their world successfully. They are attachment, affiliation, self-regulation, initiative, problem solving, and respect. Bilmes (2004:4) also asserts that these skills develop out of whatever positive beliefs children have about the environment that surrounds them. Through attachment children will come to know that there are adults who love them and keep them safe. For a child to be successful in school and in life, he or she must believe that there are adults on whom they can depend on and adults who will nurture them and keep them safe. If a child is to be sufficiently relaxed so that he or she can form healthy friendships and be able to keep a friend, he or she needs the skill of affiliation. Children also need to identify themselves as members of a group, and to realize that the world does not only revolve around them (Bilmes, 2004:6). Children also need the self-management skills that are acquired through self-regulation so that they will be able to manage their emotions and control their behaviour – another of the skills crucial in children's development. Through managing emotions, children realize that actions have consequences, that certain forms of behaviour are culturally acceptable, and that it is they themselves and not their feelings that control their behaviour. There are some children who struggle with their transitions because of their unawareness of the fluctuations of their feelings and the fact that it is not necessary for their emotions to control their behaviour (Bilmes, 2004:7).

For a child to develop, grow and change in accordance with developing circumstances, he or she should be able to learn new things (Bilmes, 2004:8). Bilmes (2004:9) also notes that children need to learn problem solving skills in the same way that they learn how to dress themselves. The final life skill that Bilmes (2004) mentions as being important is respect. Children need to learn and realize that they themselves possess unique gifts and challenges – as do their peers. McClelland and Morrison (2003:206) mention in their research that social skills include independence, responsibility, self-regulation, and cooperation, and that these are all beneficial for pre-school children because they affect academic achievement and school success.

Brackett, Reyes, Rivers, Elbertson and Salovey (2012:219) point out that children need certain skills in order to become better adjusted to their school environments. These skills improve academic performance and social behaviours, and may therefore prevent behaviour problems and reduce stress and anxiety. Such skills allow children to recognise and manage their own emotions, to feel empathy towards others, to shape and maintain satisfying relationships, to make responsible decisions, and to cope constructively with challenges.

Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:3) characterise life skills as a strategy for promoting resilience in children and in youth. They accordingly define resilience in the following way:

*“Adaptation needed to cope skilfully with demanding circumstances. Coping in the face of difficulties so that one remains functional and enjoys life”*

Fisher (2003:55) states that the natural resilience of children needs to be strengthened. Fisher (2003:56) also maintains that during the education of children, the foundations of trust, security, self-esteem and confidence need to be developed so that they can deal effectively with the stressors that they encounter in their daily lives. To emphasize the importance of all forms of self-confidence, Saunders and Remsberg (1987:12) state that children who are best able to deal with stress are those with adequate amounts of self-confidence. While I agree with their assertion that self-confidence is necessary, I am also of the opinion that it is not the only necessary skill that people need for dealing with stress. I assumed that if human beings are to be made capable of dealing with stress effectively, they would need a

number of life skills. While not everyone with self-confidence is able to deal with stress efficiently, it may nevertheless play an important role in the process.

Hanley *et al.* (2007:277) assert that the participating teachers in their research identified life skills such as communication, delayed tolerance, and friendship skills as important for early school success. After they taught these three skills to the children in their groups, they noted a 74% reduction in problem behaviour and a four-fold increase in preschool life skills. I accordingly also taught these skills during my sessions with the participants (see a later chapter for further details). Schiller (2009:20) refers to the research of Glossop and Mitchell (2005) into a child's readiness to learn in terms of social and emotional intelligence. They came to the conclusion that elements such as confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, relatedness, capacity to communicate and cooperativeness were crucial elements for school success. De Klerk and Le Roux (2003:12) refer to self-knowledge, self-acceptance, self-awareness, communication, emotional control, values, beliefs, thinking patterns, social skills, problem solving skills and resilience as skills that are important if one wishes to increase the levels of emotional intelligence in children.

In a study done by Zins, Elias and Greenberg (2003:58), they refer to the five skills that were identified by means of research into the brain functions, learning, development and motivation of children by Elias, Zins, Weissberg, Frey, Greenberg, Haynes, Kessler, Schwab-Stone and Shriver (1997). These skills provide children with directions for their behaviour in every facet of their lives. These skills include self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision making, self-management skills and relationship building skills (Zins *et al.*, 2003:58).

For the purpose of this study, I agreed with the findings of Hanley *et al.* (2007:277) that life skills such as communication, delayed tolerance, and friendship skills are all necessary for early school success. I further assumed that learned life skills played an important role in easing the extended transitions of individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2.



### 2.4.3 COPING

*“We shape our tools and afterwards our tools shape us”* (Marshall McLuhan).

Lazarus (1991:112, in Frydenberg, 1999:17), defines coping as “the cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands (and conflicts between them) that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person”. Frydenberg (1999:17) describes coping in terms of the thoughts, feelings and actions that someone uses in order to manage stress. Zeitlin and Williamson (1994:12) defines coping as a process of adaptation in order to meet the individuals personal needs and to act in response to the demands of the environment. During this process, an individual uses personal resources for managing frustrations, threats, routines and challenges to maintain a feeling of well-being. Zeitlin and Williamson (1994:12) also note that coping involves additional learned actions. Folkman (2011:189) refers to the broaden-and-build theory<sup>5</sup> of Fredrickson (2001:218) regarding the adaptive utility of positive emotions such as interest and joy. This theory states that positive emotions may indicate safety to an individual and that it may signal to people that it is safe for them to explore their environment. Fredrickson (2001:218) also identifies what he regards as another use of positive emotions, namely that they are helpful for developing an inventory of coping strategies which can be kept in reserve until it is necessary to use them to cope with stress. For the purposes of this study, I agreed with the views of Fredrickson (2001) about the value of positive emotions in the coping process. I shall therefore discuss and explain which positive emotions the main participants used during the transition from Grade R through to Grade 2.

Sorensen (1993:15) notes that the way in which people cope with situations or events is mostly important when it comes to the consequences of stress. For the purpose of this study, I agreed with Sorensen (1993) about coping strategies and when it comes to the consideration of the consequences of stress. I will therefore explain how the individuals within a township exercised their coping strategies during their transitions from Grade R through to Grade 2.

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<sup>5</sup> The broaden-and-build theory details the adaptive functions of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001).

Lazarus and Folkman (1998:150) mention two types of coping: emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. While problem-focused coping is designed to help people to manage the problem that caused the stress, emotion-focused coping is designed to help people to regulate their emotional responses to the problem. While emotion-focused coping is what happens present when nothing can be done in a challenging situation, while problem-focused coping is what happens when conditions in a situation can be changed. Examples of emotion-focused coping are avoidance, minimization, distancing oneself from a situation, the making of positive comparisons, or looking for whatever positive values might be present in negative events. Problem-focused coping consists of strategies that are similar to those used in problem solving. When people define a problem, they generate alternative solutions on their other possible options in terms of potential costs and benefits. The difference between problem solving and problem-focused coping is that during problem solving, the individual focuses on the environment. But in problem-focused coping, the individual focuses on strategies that are directed inwards (Lazarus & Folkman, 1998:152). Zeitlin and Williamson (1994:453) refer to problem-focused coping as dealing with the problem itself so as to achieve the goal of altering the stressor through some predetermined solution to the problem. Emotion-focused coping regulates the negative emotional experiences of the specific stressor involved. Zeitlin and Williamson (1994:25) argue that coping may provide a stabilizing factor that may actually help individuals to sustain their psychosocial adaptation during stressful periods.

For the purposes of this study, the transitions from Grade R to Grade 1, and then later the transition to Grade 2, were the challenges that I felt could be dealt with by means of problem-focused coping. But since the participants had no choice about whether they wished to proceed to Grade 1 or not, there was no possible alternative solution to what amounted to a challenging environmental condition. They *possibly* learned their emotion-focused coping by means of the life skills I taught them during the transition process so that they would be in a position to regulate whatever negative experiences they encountered.

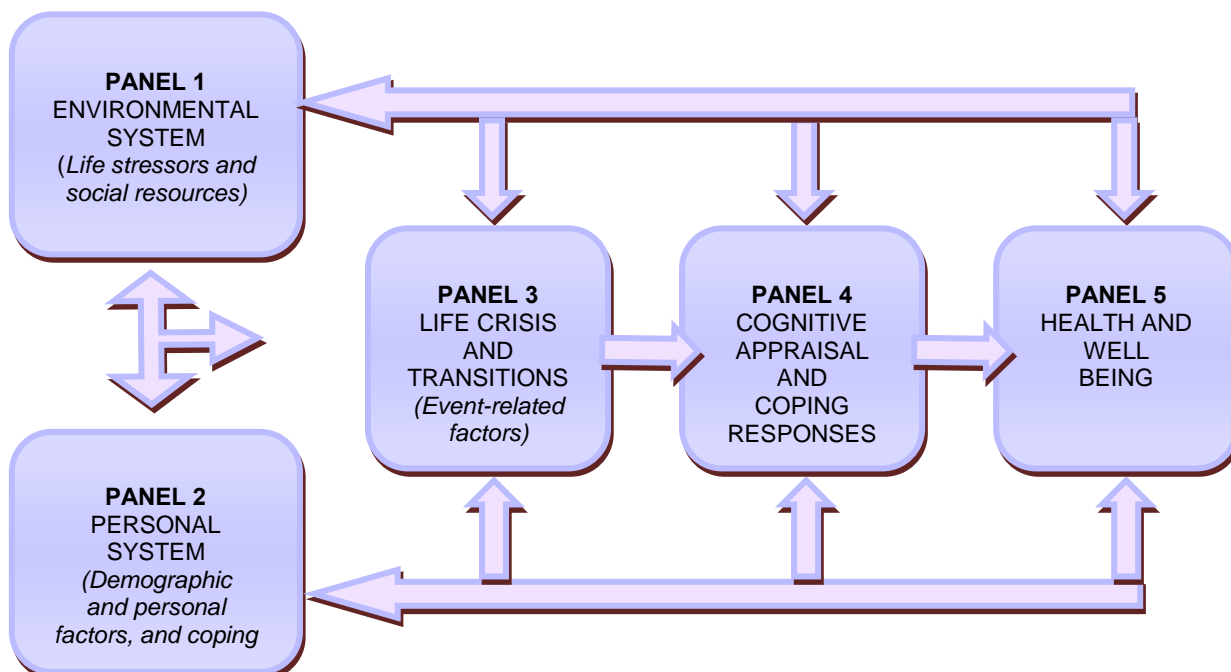
Folkman (2011:421) recommends that it may be helpful to expand our focus to include techniques from stress-and-coping through the inclusion of positive affect interventions. Because the inclusion of such approaches were beneficial to the

coping process, they made the participating individuals in the research being better equipped to adjust to any of the detrimental effects of stress that might have arisen. For the purposes of this study, I agreed with Folkman (2011:421) that we should also focus on stress-and-coping techniques through positive affect intervention. In this study, the various learned life skills served as positive affect interventions for the individuals within a township to use as life skills and positive coping method to reduce the effect of stressors during the transitions.

## **2.5 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

I decided to use Moos and Schaefer's (1993) coping process framework (set out in Zeidner & Endler, 1996:27) as a general conceptual framework for this study because it emphasises two important considerations that I considered to be appropriate for this study: Firstly, it emphasises that enduring both personal as well as more transient situational factors shapes the coping efforts of individuals (Zeidner & Endler 1996:26). The participants' coping methods, support and acquired life skills, together with their transitions to primary school and their ambient stressors at that time, affected and shaped their coping process that I investigated during the course of the study. Secondly, this particular framework emphasises the internal mediating role of cognitive appraisal and coping responses in the stress process. It also sets out the pathways in the framework that indicate that it is possible for reciprocal feedback to occur at every stage. In the context of this study, the participants were thus able to look back and reflect on the coping process, on what they had learned, on which of the resources were helpful, as well as what they intended to do in future (Zeidner & Endler 1996:27).

**Figure 2.1: Conceptual framework for this study (Zeidner & Endler, 1996:27)**



The environmental system (set out in panel 1) includes the ongoing life stressors in the environment (in this study, these consist of the positive and negative stressors that are evoked by the various transitions to primary school, as well as the social resources such as family support, teacher support and school support). The personal system (panel 2) is composed of the participants' socio-demographic characteristics as well as their personal coping resources such as self-confidence or positive anger management skills as well as emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping. Both these environmental and personal factors influenced the transitions or life crises that the participants needed to face. The stressors included those that they encountered during their transition to primary school and in Grade 1, their first school year, as well as in Grade 2, their second school year (panel 3). It was by means of cognitive appraisal as well as by the participants' coping responses to the situation (panel 4) that their health and well-being was shaped (panel 5). The life skills the individuals within a township acquired in their pre-school for the purposes of this study, might very well be useful to them as coping responses that make a positive or negative impact on stressors they experience in Grade 1 and Grade 2. The five panels depict the main concepts that I utilised for the conduct of this study.

## 2.6 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I discussed, described and integrated the central constructs concerned with the transitions of the individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2. These constructs consisted of transition concepts in general, a description of the challenges that these children might experience during their transitions, and their school readiness. I also elaborated on the individuals within a township, their attitudes as and when I found them, and on the nature of the possible bonding between them. I also discussed, described and explored the challenges which they could encounter as individuals, the challenges that resulted from being part of a township, the possibilities inherent in dominance and dependency within a township, the nature of individuality within a township during their preschool years, and the possibility of separating them in their learning environments. Since stress is also one of the key concepts in this study, I described the various conditions that resulted from stress, emotion and coping, the causes of school-related stress among children, and the concept of school-related stress for the purposes of this study. Lastly I elaborated on the nature and purpose of life skills. I focused on what I considered to be the most important life skills during the school years, and the nature of coping in general. In concluding this chapter, I incorporated and explained the conceptual framework that scaffolds this study. In the following chapter I discuss and describe the methodological processes that I used in my inquiry and research strategies, and the manner in which I applied them in the study.

