

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Dockett and Perry (2011:374) have suggested numerous reasons why it would be worthwhile to describe and examine the perspectives and impressions of children at the time when they are starting school. Firstly, children are the experts on their own lives and they live out their childhood experiences in the present. Secondly, the experiences of children are different from those of adults, and if we are able to acquire a clear understanding of their experiences, we may be able to respond to whatever it is that is important to them. Furthermore, it is by listening to children with care, attention and respect that we are able to make their personal interests and concerns a reality. When we take the trouble to elucidate the way in which children perceive the world, we give them the gift of being heard in an adult environment in which children's voices may be silenced by the preconceptions of adults. When we open ourselves to the opinions, feelings and thoughts of children, we are tacitly admitting to ourselves and to them that their experiences are also valuable, important, interesting, as well as being part of the total picture of the world inhabited by all of us.

Hirst, Jervis, Visagie, Sojo and Cavanagh (2011:30) concluded that many transition programs tend to focus mainly on the *orientation* of the child, as well as on the social and emotional factors that are influential in a child's successful transition to, and adjustment in, school.

Booyesen and Grosser (2008:377) refer in their study to one of the goals included in the National Curriculum Statement of South Africa. This goal states that all learners (referring thereby to all learners from Grade R to Grade 12) need to obtain the necessary social skills that will enable them to work with others, listen to others, ask constructive questions, pay attention at appropriate moments, praise others, and deal with conflict appropriately. One of the most important observations in this study, for the purposes of this research, was that the majority of learners in the Foundation

Phase *do not display satisfactory levels of social competency* (Booyesen & Grosser, 2008:378).

One of my main reasons for engaging in this study was that I support and subscribe to the reasons that Dockett and Perry (2011:374) advance for accessing children's' perspectives at the beginning of their school careers. In addition to this, I am also in agreement with Hirst *et al.* (2011:30) when they observe that social and emotional factors may be influential when individuals within a township transition from Grade R to Grade 2. In this study, I was mainly concerned with the feelings, thoughts and understanding of individuals within a township as they transition from Grade R through to Grade 2. This study makes extensive use of the voices and attitudes displayed by the individuals within a township as it strove to understand their opinions about the transition process by making use of their own words and, as it were, 'looking through their own eyes'.

1.2 RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The rationale of this study is that it is, firstly, a pro-gradation and expansion on the research that I carried out in my master's degree (Prozesky, 2005). My specific purpose in that research was to identify and describe the particular stressors that are experienced by Grade 1 learners in their school environment. One of the recommendations I made at the conclusion of that study was that it would be useful if further research were to be carried out to examine and clarify, in a more holistic manner, the stressors that are experienced by Grade 1 learners.

The second rationale for this study is that, for the past six years, I have been working as a life skill facilitator for children who were 4 years old and who were in all standards up to Grade 7. During this time I particularly observed how many children struggle to cope with schooling, and especially with the demands made of them in the first year of their school attendance (Grade 1). Because I have a particularly keen and passionate interest in the wellbeing of Grade 1 and Grade 2 children and in their experience of these challenging but exciting transitional years, I decided to formalise my interest in them by pursuing research by means of doctoral research.

In my master's degree, I identified and described, as I have already noted above, the stressors that are experienced by Grade 1 learners. In my doctoral research, I identified, described, and examined in greater depth the transition that children make from preschool to Grade 1 and thus to Grade 2.

While most studies in this field focus on a single transition such as that from Grade R to Grade 1, it is my contention that a more comprehensive and useful conceptualisation of what is involved in transition can be obtained by working with a multi-step process such as the transition from Grade R through to Grade 2. This research therefore focuses on the multiple steps involved in the longer transition from Grade R to Grade 2. My preparatory examination of the literature database on these themes led me to the conclusion that there is a scarcity of South African studies that focus on the transition experiences of individuals within a township. I therefore developed the intention of contributing to the accumulated and existing knowledge on this theme.

1.3 ORIENTATION

1.3.1 TRANSITION FROM PRESCHOOL TO PRIMARY SCHOOL, SCHOOL READINESS, SCHOOL SUCCESS, AND LIFE SKILLS

In a study undertaken in 2005, Cassidy (2005:151) arrived at the conclusion that many teachers (working as participants in the process) have arrived at independently by means of their own observations, namely that children have very little time to settle into their new environment and familiarise themselves with the kind of behaviour that is expected of them as they *transition* from preschool to primary school. Cassidy (2005) also noted that the Grade 1 children in his study were no longer so active in acquiring the necessary scholastic skills as they were in adapting socially and emotionally to the challenging demands of the school and the physical, intellectual and social expectations of their teachers. While I agree with Cassidy (2005:151) that Grade 1 children are indeed more preoccupied in adapting socially and emotionally to the requirements of their school and teachers, I also contend that such children should also actively focus on the scholastic skills they need as well as the social and emotional skills they require to cope with their

schooling experiences. It is my contention that it is insufficient for teachers to focus only on the social and emotional skills required by children in Grade 1.

Lilia, Neuhart-Pritchett and Neuhart-Pritchett (2008:256) have identified five domains which they believe must be addressed in the pursuit of *school readiness*. These domains include those of physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language development, as well as cognitive and general knowledge. They also identified eight factors that affect the *transition to school* in their research. These are social adjustment skills, attitudes toward school, the expectations of behaviour and action, physical attributes, family issues, as well as the education environment in general.

Dockett and Perry (2008:274) also mentioned five factors that exert a decisive influence on *school readiness*, which are similar to those of Lilia *et al.* (2008:256). Their list includes children's health and physical development, their social and emotional development, and their idiosyncratic approaches to learning, language development and communication. Cognitive and general knowledge were also among the five conditions that these researchers mention as contributing to school readiness. I am in complete agreement with the findings of these researchers with regard to the domains, areas and factors that they identified as indispensable for school readiness in children and the successful transition to school and from one grade to another.

Apart from the above-mentioned components, which are crucially important for children because they make a significant impact on their ability to *transition to school*, Laverick (2008:321) also identified other key components that are necessary for the support of young children as they *start school*. These additional components include a consideration of the developmental characteristics of young children, the establishment of relationships with their families, the recognition of certain factors that affect successful adjustment to new situations, and the implementation of strategies that assist young children in the *transition* process itself. I am also in agreement with Laverick (2008:321) when he states that children will benefit from a support structure before and during a transition process.

Some of the skills concerned with *school readiness* in the above-mentioned studies also correlate with skills that researchers have identified when examining the conditions that contribute to *school success*. Brigman, Lane, Switzer, Lane and Lawrence (1999:2) conducted a study that involved 145 preschool children between the ages of 4 and 5. They then identified the following skills as being most predictive for long-term *school success*: attending skills, listening skills, and social skills. They also found that the academic success of children increased in proportion to the number of such skills that they possessed. While I agree that attending, listening and social skills are essential for school success, I would further contend that the ability to practise such skills also contributes to the ease with which individuals within a township are able to progress from Grade R through to Grade 2.

As a result of their study, McClelland and Morrison (2003:1) concluded that learning-related social skills in preschool children, such as independence, responsibility, self-regulation, and cooperation, might well make a demonstrable positive impact on *school success* in higher grades. It is my contention in this study that such skills not only make a positive impact later in the child's school career, but that they also positively affect a child's early school success and school transition processes. Lilia *et al.* (2008:256) also suggest that children who make a smooth *transition* and who experience early *school success*, tend to acquire and maintain higher levels of social competence as well as academic achievement throughout their school careers. I am in agreement with the conclusions of Lilia *et al.* (2008:256) that a smooth transition from one grade to another in the earliest school years also enhances a child's social competence and level of academic achievement.

In their national survey of *transition* practices of kindergarten teachers, Early, Pianta, Taylor and Cox (2001:206) concluded that optimal *transitions* for children are best supported when various steps are taken prior to the child's first day of school in a format where various face-to-face contacts with the children concerned and with their families are established. During the course of my research, I realised that most transition practices are group-orientated, that they occur only after the beginning of the first school year to a class as a whole, and that individualised sessions with children are extremely rare (Early *et al.*, 2001). The belief that preschool programmes can enhance and strengthen *school readiness* has also been mentioned by Gormley, Phillips and Gayer (2008:1723). But it is my contention

that transition practices prior to the first day of school may be more beneficial for children because they may reduce the effect of certain stressors and ambient uncertainties. In spite of this, I argue that a transition programme after the first school year has commenced, may also offer children certain advantages because those who run such programmes will be able to address the immediacy of the stressors that children are experiencing from day to day as they attempt to cope with their transition experiences.

A child's experience of the beginning of school is one of the first but most important passages that any child will have to cope with during his or her years in school education. *Starting school*, leaving home, moving to a new city and starting a new job, are all life situations that engender feelings of excitement, apprehension and fear in most people. If the experiences of a child with regard to all these transitions are all positive, affirming and inspiring rather than negative and traumatising, it will be much easier for that child to cope with any new challenges involving change in his or her future (Berne, 2003:1). While I agree with Berne that positive and affirming experiences in the child's past may exert a beneficial influence on the ability to cope with changes in the future, it has been my experience that positive experiences of change in the past do not necessarily guarantee a positive experience of change in the future in the same way that a negative experience of change in the past may not necessarily result in a negative experience of change in the child's future. I therefore hypothesise that while past experiences of change may indeed exert an impact on any experience of change in the future, every transition or experience of change that the child experiences should be regarded as a complete whole and that it should be viewed as such. It is therefore my contention that it is not feasible to make generalisations about the effect that past experiences of change will have on future or present experiences of change.

While many children do experience school as a positive, affirming and challenging place, there are many children who do not. Many children in fact associate their school years with feelings of unhappiness that vary in intensity from one child to another.

“By preparing your child for school, which involves teaching him the skills that will help him adapt to his new environment, ... you will make these years as stress-free as possible” (Berne, 2003:2).

Fabian (2000) is of the opinion that children experience the first year of school as radically different from what they had been accustomed to in their preschool and in their home environment. The dislocation engendered by such differences may well affect the way in which children adjust to school, and it also suggests to us that the extent of a child's emotional and social well-being may be an accurate predictor of just how well or badly they may settle into school.

Phatudi (2007:145) made significant conclusions in her study of how well children from disadvantaged backgrounds made the transition from preschool to school and from home to primary school. Most of the children who were participants in her study were of the opinion that primary school was better than preschool because primary school offered them opportunities for learning how to read, pass examinations, which may assist them to eventually find jobs so that they could buy food, clothes and cars for their parents. Phatudi (2007) also stated that the children seemed to know what to expect from primary school. She found that the children in her study knew, for example, that a school was a "big building", that they needed to be able to read and write, and that there would be "no more sleeping" during school times (one of the features of their pre-primary schooling).

1.3.2 INDIVIDUALS WITHIN A TWINSHIP

Rosemary, Theroux, Josephine and Tingley (1978:77) observed that individuals within a township continued to grow in independence during their preschool years, something that is common to most children. They also noted that individual preferences with regard to clothing, toys and the need to have more contact with the outside world become more prominent in the lives of these children. For the purpose of this study, I agree with the findings of Rosemary *et al.* (1978:70), and have thus argued that contact with other children of the same age gives individuals within a township a head start in their ability to choose separate friends. I also agree that separation from their mother is an advantage because it is in preschool that they will acquire the ability to carry through a successful separation in kindergarten. These researchers also noted that the intimacy as well as security of individuals within a township relationship may make it difficult for them to form external relationships with friends at a later stage (Rosemary *et al.*, 1978:71). Klein (2003:12) also observes that other children in preschool may relate to the individuals within a township as part

of that twinship while some may relate to either of them as individuals. It is on the basis of their early experiences with others that the individual within a twinship will acquire the ability to contract and nurture new social relationships. For the purpose of this study, the individuals within a twinship' friends and social circles will be explained by themselves, as well as their own relationship with one another.

On the topic of individuality within a twinship, Rosemary *et al.* (1978:75) note that while most identical individuals within a twinship show no signs of jealousy, their central challenge is one of identity formation. In contrast to this, fraternal individuals within a twinship may struggle with feelings of jealousy that are engendered by their different personalities as well as their contest for the parents' attention. For the purpose of this study, I will consider the life skills of being able to form an identity, and maintain individuality and uniqueness. I will pay attention to how the participant individuals within a twinship perceived themselves, firstly, as individuals as such, and, secondly, as individuals *within* a twinship. These characteristics as well as the similarities and differences they manifest within a twinship were examined from their own point of view and from the point of view of the other participants in the study, who were the researcher, their mother, and their Grade R, Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers.

With regard to the dominance and dependency of individuals within a twinship, Friedrich and Rowland (1984:296) noted that a possible misconception about individuals within a twinship is that one of the individuals within a twinship may be required to be *in charge of* the relationship. They also noted that while it occasionally happens that one of the individuals within a twinship may sometimes develop dominance in a certain area of the relationship, even this perceived dominance may change as the pair develop and grow. It is true that some individuals within a twinship may even feel incomplete without the co-twin, and that other individuals within a twinship may need the presence of the co-twin to complete their sentences or to be able to stop crying or fall asleep. When individuals within a twinship are treated as opposites, they may begin to experience dependency as well as challenges around their self-image. Finally, Malmstrom and Poland (1999), in Klein (2003:3), mention that if individuals within a twinship are to develop individual uniqueness and independence, adequate and sympathetic parenting is indispensable. In the absence of such pro-active parenting, one individual within a

twinship may assume a more dominant role and the other individual within a twinship may adopt a more passive and submissive role. Even though there is a scarcity of literature that deals specifically with individuals within a twinship and their prospects for school readiness, Taal (2000:107) mentions that every individual case is different and that no generalising statements can be made that are valid for all individuals within a twinship.

For the purpose of this study, I agree with Taal (2000:107) when he says that every twinship is unique and that it develops and grows in the context of a distinctive and unique background. I also therefore agree that generalising statements that will be valid for all twinships, should not be made.

1.3.3 STRESS, STRESSORS AND COPING

Lazarus and Folkman (1998:1) note that while the term *stress* is widely used in the biological and social sciences, it is also encountered in education. They also point out that we are constantly confronted with messages about how *stress* can be prevented, managed and even eliminated in our popular culture (Lazarus & Folkman, 1998:1).

“Stress has become a household word, and we are flooded with messages about how it can be prevented, eliminated, managed, or just lived with. A major reason for the currently high profile that stress research and theory has acquired is abundant evidence that it is important for our social, physiological, and psychological health” (Lazarus, 1999:27).

Stress occurs in all kinds of situations but particularly at home, at work, in school, and anywhere where people are compelled to form close relationships with one another – a necessity for members of a family, and for students, teachers, co-workers and lovers (Lazarus, 1999:29). According to Lee (2003:9), children have different reactions to *stress*. When some children experience stress, they may display signs of anger and exhibit an abnormally high demand for attention. Other children in the same situation may withdraw from the group or the situation or feel increasingly anxious and frightened. Primary school children may react to stress by whining or not attending to friendships and other important school matters. In such

circumstances, they may also find it difficult to describe their feelings and may conclude that they are unloved (Lee, 2003:12).

In my own master's study, I pointed out that the findings showed that certain *stressors* are already present during the Grade 1 year (Prozesky, 2005:102). I identified the following positive and negative *stressors* that are encountered by children in a Grade 1 urban school environment:

1.3.3.1 Positive stressors

⌘ The teacher

It was found that the Grade 1 learners in my study generally had a positive perception of their teacher. I also concluded in the study that children preferred a teacher who maintained discipline in the classroom and who created and maintained an orderly atmosphere.

⌘ The need for learning and teaching

It was found that the main goal of most of the learners in the study was to pass Grade 1 so that they could proceed to Grade 2. Most of these learners were therefore motivated to work hard in school.

⌘ Friendships

During the course of my study, I discovered that most of the participant Grade 1 learners had a strong need for a friend or company in the playground. The most important need for these learners was to have someone – anyone – who would be with them during break time so that they would not have to play on their own or be seen standing alone during break time. While some of the children found it difficult to make friends at the beginning of the year, others found it both easy and pleasant to make new friends.

1.3.3.2 Negative stressors

⌘ Noise and chaos in classrooms

The findings of my study indicated that Grade 1 learners seemed to appreciate a classroom environment in which order, silence and discipline were maintained. Further investigation suggested that the reason for this was, firstly, that if order,

silence and discipline were maintained, the learners would be able to concentrate on and complete the work that was expected from them. Secondly, the participants in the study felt that if the disruption caused by certain children were to disrupt the whole class, this might in turn upset the teacher, and the children were not comfortable with the prospect that the teacher might be upset.

⌘ **Bullies and teasing on the playground**

Participants in the study indicated that some Grade 1 learners laughed and teased their fellow Grade 1 learners. The learners who participated in the interviews stated that nobody liked to be teased or ridiculed. They reported that some of the children, especially the boys, would form small groups from which they would venture to hit or bully others.

⌘ **Fear of older learners in school**

According to the Grade 1 learners in this particular school, the older children would sometimes steal their money, take their food, or even pinch or hurt them in other ways.

I used the definition of *stress* provided by Hobfoll (1998:55) for the purpose of this doctoral study. Hobfoll (1998:55) noted that stress develops in circumstances in which a threat occurs or in which a person loses resources¹. He therefore concluded that stress occurs wherever resources are threatened or lost, or where a person fails to obtain an adequate amount of necessary resources. One of the ways in which stress can manifest is, according to De Wit & Booysen (1994:145), in the form of external pressure or in the form of a particular stressor that induces pressure or anxiety. I used these definitions of stress in my study of how individuals make the transition within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2.

In Selye (1982), as in Monat and Lazarus (1991:29), *stressors* are defined as the demands that evoke a patterned response. Lee's (2003:9) definition is similar: he defines a *stressor* as a factor that causes *stress*. Page and Page (2007:144) elaborate on that by providing the following examples of *stressors* encountered in the school environment: the teacher's attitudes, mannerisms, behaviour, personality,

¹ A resource include objects, conditions, and personal characteristics as well as energies that are themselves valued for survival (Hobfoll, 1998:54).

English as a second language, harassment, peer pressures, homework, evaluation, academic pressure, competition, extracurricular activities, and the length of the school day. They add that children in kindergarten, first grade and second grade sometimes feel stressed about schoolwork, completing creative projects correctly, and understanding work assignments. For the purpose of this study, I described and explained certain factors that may evoke stress because of positive and negative stressors encountered during the transition of individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2.

According to Page and Page (2007:145), there are others stressors apart from those encountered in schoolwork. Such *stressors* include peer relationships (peer pressure, sharing, arguing and friendships), personal injury (getting pushed, kicked or hurt, emergency drills, theft, loss of personal belongings), the loss of personal comfort and space (homework interfering with personal time, the school schedule, a loss of recess time, noise, changing classes, and the teacher being absent at various times during the day or merely entirely absent from school).

Lazarus (1999:102) defines *coping* as the way in which people manage certain life conditions that they experience as *stressful*. It is my contention that one might say that, to some extent, *stress* and *coping* are necessarily complementary. Stress levels may therefore become high when *coping* is ineffective, and they may, by the same token, become lower when coping is effective. But this is not always the case because people may experience high levels of stress even when their coping is effective. Lazarus (1991:12) offers another definition of coping. He suggests that *coping* consists of cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage the specific external or internal demands that a person finds taxing because those demands begin to exceed the ability of the person to process them. In Table 1.1, Moos and Schaefer (1993) in Goldberger and Breznitz (1993) sets out a number of basic coping strategies (as described originally in Zeidner and Endler, 1996:28).

Table 1.1: Four basic categories of coping strategies with eight associated coping subtypes (Zeidner & Endler, 1996:28)

Basic coping categories	Coping subtypes
Cognitive approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local analysis (Did you think of different ways to deal with the problem?) ○ Positive reappraisal (Did you think about how you were much better off than other people with similar problems?)
Behavioural approach	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seeking guidance and support (Did you talk with a friend about the problem?) ○ Taking problem-solving action (“Did you devise a plan of action and follow it?”)
Cognitive avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Cognitive avoidance (Did you try to forget the whole matter?) ○ Resigned acceptance (Did you lose the hope that things would ever be the same again?)
Behavioural avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Seeking alternative rewards (Did you become involved in new activities?) ○ Emotional discharge (Did you yell or shout to let off steam?)

Coping, according to Beck (2004:280), may also be defined in the following way:

“... any way that we may voluntarily try to control stress or anxiety in ourselves. Coping activities are self-regulatory. The individual consciously does something to deal with his or her own situation.”

I adopted the assumption implicit in this definition for the purposes of this study. This assumption is that a learned *life skill* may act as a coping mechanism for school-related *stressors*. What follows from this is the further assumption that, when we focus on finding techniques for coping with school *stressors*, we need to equip learners with suitable *life skills* so that they will be able to cope with the stressors that arise in their lives. We may not be able to teach learners to eliminate such stressors completely, but we may be able to make them skilful enough to prevent stressors from impacting negatively on their lives. In other words, we may make the assumption that if a *life skill* may serve as a coping skill, they may even be conceptually equivalent to one another.

According to Rooth (2000:28), the need for primary school children to acquire certain *life skills* is of the utmost high importance. During the primary school years, the life skills that children learn may be preventative. Such skills will enable them to ameliorate the impact of the various social-emotional stressors that they encounter in their environment. *Life skills* may also hold out benefits because once children have learned such skills, they will be able to use them later in their adult lives. I agree with Rooth (2000:28) about how important it is to furnish primary schoolchildren with a variety of basic life skills. I feel very strongly that it is essential not to underestimate the importance of life skills in the lives of preschool children in particular.

Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:4) have stated that the concept *life skills* is virtually self-explanatory. People who possess *life skills* are able to enrich their lives in meaningful ways. After examining and discussing various definitions of life skills, Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:57) concluded that all *life skills* have the following things in common:

“Interpretations of the concept life skills have the following in common: the focus in each case is on those skills and strategies that enable an individual to act in accordance with the demands of the self, others and the environment” (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006:57).

The World Health Organization has defined *life skills* as a group of psychosocial competencies and interpersonal skills that help people to make informed decisions, think critically, solve problems, think creatively, build healthy relationships, have empathy with others, and *cope* with their lives in a healthy and productive manner (Page & Page, 2007:45). Page and Page (2007) elaborate on the critical importance of life skills in young people from the earliest years and throughout childhood, adolescence and adulthood development. They note that because most students have to deal with a variety of pressures, concerns and problems, they need *life skills* so that they will be able to meet the challenges with which life confronts them (Page & Page, 2007:45). For the purpose of this study, I agree with Rooth (2000:28), Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:4), and Page and Page, (2007:45), about the importance of *life skills* and the role that *life skills* may play in a person’s life from the earliest years through to adulthood. In this study, however, I focused on the kind of *life skills* that are necessary for individuals within a township as they transition from Grade R

through to Grade 2. With this in mind, I discussed and explained why an appropriate number of *life skills* is indispensable for learners at this level.

Rooth (2000:11) is of the opinion that the acquisition of appropriate *life skills* can enable individuals to *build capacity*. *Capacity building* in this sense means that individuals are able to build on their inherent potential and grow and develop as individuals. When individuals are thus empowered, they believe in themselves and are able to cope with life. Such a capacity also enables them to be more motivated to do what they have to do and realize their latent abilities and potential. Individuals who have the necessary capacity are able to take ownership of their lives and exercise the kind of control over their lives that is appropriate to their age level and situation. Such people have a sense of being in charge of what is happening to them, and they also feel more confident when facing the challenges that life presents to them. For the purposes of this study, I agree with Rooth (2000:11) that life skills enable an individual to build capacity in his or her life and so increase a sense of empowerment, all of which are of importance during transition processes.

Because life skills provide us with *tools* for meeting the challenges of everyday life, they are a necessary precursor to a healthy lifestyle and the management of *stress*. Studies in Gillbert and Orlick (2002:54) have also demonstrated that elementary school children have the ability to learn certain stress control strategies. For the purpose of this study, I agree with Gillbert and Orlick (2002:54) that elementary school children have the ability to learn certain stress control strategies. But I also believe that preschool children, who are younger than elementary school children, are able to learn certain control strategies.

I shall now discuss the two additional but related forms of *coping*, namely emotion-focused coping and problem-focused coping (Zeidner & Endler, 1996:9). Emotion-focused coping may be defined as coping that includes strategies that involve self-preoccupation, fantasy and conscious activities that affect regulation (Zeidner & Endler, 1996:9). Emotion-focused coping has been defined by Hobfoll (1998:97) as the private, internal coping that people use to blunt threatening and painful thoughts and feelings. Beck (2004:21) states that while emotion-focused coping does not change a situation, it does help us to feel better about it. Zeidner and Endler (1996:9) note that emotion-focused coping includes the techniques of positive

reinterpretation and acceptance, and that negative emotion-focused coping involves denial, avoidance, and dwelling on negative emotions.

At the other end of the coping continuum we find problem-focused coping. Zeidner and Endler (1996:9) state that problem-focused coping involves strategies by means of which individuals reconceptualise, solve or minimise the effects of stressful situations. Hobfoll (1998:128) notes that most problem-focused coping is regarded as “healthy” because it helps people to achieve their goals. Examples of this kind of coping include seeking support, planning, or waiting for the proper time to take action. According to Hobfoll (1998:97), one may regard problem-focused coping as a general class of behaviours. Individuals use problem-focused coping to solve their problems of adjustment and adaptation.

For the purpose of this study, I agree with Hobfoll (1998:97), who states that we can measure coping by assessing the extent of our problem-solving skills when we are confronted with difficult situations. By contrast, we can assess an individual’s coping ability by how well he or she manages his or her life when beset by problems (Hobfoll, 1998:97).

In the literature review that I undertook for the purpose of this research, I focused particularly on those factors that influence the *transition to school* and *school readiness* (Berne, 2003; Cassidy, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2008; Early *et al.*, 2001; Fabian, 2000; Gormley *et al.*, 2008; Laverick, 2008; Lilia *et al.*, 2008; Phatudi, 2007). In addition to this, I focused on factors that contribute to *school success* (Brigman *et al.*, 1999; Lilia *et al.*, 2008; McClelland & Morrison, 2003). I also paid particular attention in the literature survey to the *stressors* that children experience in their earliest school years (Prozesky, 2005), the *life skills* that they can use as *coping* mechanisms when dealing with transition-related *stressors*, and to *coping* itself as a more general theme (Ebersöhn & Eloff, 2006; Hobfoll, 1998). It is necessary to point out that I struggled to find any substantial research on the theme of children’s personal experiences and their perceptions of the challenges they encounter in Grade R through to Grade 2. There was an absence of studies about the coping techniques that are currently being used to deal with these perceived *stressors*. I could also find little research into the use of *life skills* as *coping* mechanisms and there was also an absence of any in-depth discussion about

whether life skills are needed to support children during their *transition* from preschool to primary school. In addition to this, I failed to find any research on the topic of children's transitional experiences during their *Grade 2* year in primary school.

My main purpose in this study was not to establish whether or not life skills would reduce the levels of stress experienced by Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners. The focus of my investigation was rather on the nature of the overall transition of individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2. I therefore included variables such as stress, stressors, emotions, coping, and life skills for consideration because they all contributed significantly to the main theme of this study.

1.4 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore, describe and explain the transition of individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2 so that I would be in a position to offer an in-depth description of such participants' transition experiences and perspectives.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION

The primary research question that guided this study was:

How do individuals within a township transition from Grade R through to Grade 2?

In order to arrive at an answer to the primary question, I devised the following five secondary questions:

- Which life skills are necessary for young children during their transition from preschool through to Grade 2?
- What are the perceived stressors that are experienced or identified by each of the participants during the transition from Grade R to Grade 2?
- Which coping strategies did the individuals within a township use to cope with certain identified stressors both before and after life skill facilitation took place?
- How do their Grade R as well as Grade 1 and Grade 2 teachers facilitate and mediate life skills with the children in their classrooms?

- What are the expectations of individuals within a township with regard to Grade 1 and Grade 2?

1.6 GENERAL ASSUMPTIONS

I made the following **assumptions** prior to undertaking this research, and each of them informs and supports the development of my argument and the conclusions that I reached:

- Grade R, Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners are able to use acquired life skills as coping strategies for coping with stressors during the transition from Grade R through to Grade 2.
- While these life skills may assist Grade 1 and Grade 2 learners to cope with certain stressors, they may not be able to alleviate the fears that are experienced by learners during the transition from Grade R through to Grade 2.
- The stressors that I identified in my master's degree (the teacher's attitude, friendships, the need for education, physical pain and injury, the disconcerting presence of older children, bullying and teasing, and noise and chaos in the classroom), comprise some but not all of the stressors that are experienced by Grade 1 learners.
- Being part of a township may be beneficial for one or both of the individuals during the transition from Grade R through to Grade 2.

1.7 DEFINITION OF TERMS

This study was also conceptualised in terms of the following concepts, which I shall discuss in depth in the literature review chapter.

⌘ **Transition**

Corsini (2002:1017) defines a *transitional* period as the interval between two states (as, for example, between one state of equilibrium and another). In this study, the three *transitional* states are preschool (Grade R, which is the year before formal school), and the first and second year in primary school (Grade 1, the first year of formal school and Grade 2, the second year of formal school).

⌘ **Individuals within a twinship**

Taal (2000:106) defines fraternal individuals within a twinship as individuals within a twinship of the same gender or a one boy-one girl combination. They are not identical. Clegg and Woollett (1982:12) offer a more in-depth, biological definition of non-identical individuals within a twinship or fraternal individuals within a twinship. Fraternal individuals within a twinship come into being when the mother produces two separate eggs during the same cycle, both of which are fertilized by different spermatozoa, which travel separately into the uterus. Fraternal individuals within a twinship are at all times connected to separate and different placentae, amnions and chorions. Such individuals within a twinship are also called binovular or dizygotic individuals within a twinship. In other words, they develop from *two* separate fertilized eggs or zygotes. For the purpose of this study, which is predicated on monozygotic individuals within a twinship (boys), I will use the term “individuals within a twinship” because it is my considered opinion that individuals within a twinship are two separate individuals who together form one twinship.

⌘ **Grade R, Grade 1 and Grade 2**

According to the Unesco International Bureau of Education, *Grade R* (the reception year) is defined as the year preceding Grade 1. Grade R caters for children who are 5 years of age (Unesco International Bureau of Education, 4:2006). According to the South African Schools Act (South African School Act, 1996, Act 84 of 1996), *Grade 1* is the first school year in primary school, and it is determined by the child’s calculated age for a certain grade (the number of the grade plus 6 ($1 + 6 = 7$)). A Grade 1 learner will therefore most probably be turning 7 in Grade 1. Grade 2 is therefore the year following Grade 1. Most children will probably turn 8 in their Grade 2 year. For the purpose of this study, both the individuals within a twinship examined in this study turned 6 in their Grade R year, 7 in their Grade 1 year, and 8 in their Grade 2 year.

⌘ **Stressors**

According to the American Psychological Association (2007:898), a *stressor* may be defined as any event, force or condition that results in physical or emotional stress. *Stressors* may be internal or external forces that require adjustment or coping strategies on the part of the affected individual. Corsini (2002:951) defines a *stressor* as a stimulus, event or situation that physically or psychologically taxes the

adaptive capacity of an organism. Such an event may also be injurious to the organism. For this study, I regarded a *stressor* as anything, positive or negative, that exerts an effect on pre-primary and primary participants.

⌘ **Stress**

The American Psychological Association (2007:898) has stated that *stress* causes changes that affect nearly every system of the body, and that such changes influence how people feel and behave. Corsini (2002:951) defines *stress* as the forces that exert a deleterious effect on organism, effects that disturb its normal equilibrium (homeostasis). The changes that result from stress cause physical and psychological strains that make it necessary for an individual to adjust to such demands.

Hobfoll (1998:28) observed that stress is engendered by a state in which valued goals are threatened or lost, or a state in which individuals are unable to create the necessary conditions for obtaining or sustaining their goals. For the purposes of this study, I regarded the term *stress* as that state in which people find themselves when they are confronted with particular stressors.

⌘ **Emotions**

The American Psychological Association (2007:325) defines *emotions* as complex reaction patterns that incorporate a number of different experimental, behavioural and physiological elements which an individual uses in an attempt to cope with personally significant matters and events. Emotions typically also involve feelings. According to Corsini (2002:324), an *emotion* is any mental state that is characterised by various degrees of feeling, and it is usually accompanied by motor expressions. The subjective state of an emotion may be pleasurable, frightening, threatening, or of some other nature. Common *emotions* are anger, fear and love. For the purposes of this study, I define *emotion* as any feeling that is present in the participants as a result of their transitions from preschool to primary school, feelings that are experienced as stressors and that require a response in terms of the participant's life skills.

⌘ **Coping**

Zeidner and Endler (1996:25) define *coping* as a stabilising factor that can help individuals to maintain their psychosocial adaptation during stressful events or situations. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1998:141), coping is the constantly changing cognitive and behavioural effort that individuals exert to manage specific external and/or internal demands that they experience as taxing or exceeding the resources of their ability to cope. Hobfoll (1998:128) commented that *coping* as a behavioural style supposes that individuals will display characteristic modes of coping in certain situations. Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:53) describe *resilience* as the adaptational skill that individuals need to cope successfully with demanding circumstances so that they remain functional and able to enjoy their lives. In this study, I define *coping* as any resource that the participants were able to use to *cope* with or deal with the challenges that they encountered in their transition from preschool to primary school.

⌘ **Life skills**

Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:4) refer to *life skills* as the wide range of proficiencies or coping behaviours that people use so that they can function effectively in the modern world.

“Life skills are essential skills that make life easier and increase the possibility of us realising our potential and becoming productively involved in the community ... Life skills are skills necessary for successful living and learning” (Rooth, 2000:6).

I shall now elaborate on the correlation between *life skills*, as defined by Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:4), and the Learning Area Life Orientation of the National Curriculum (2002) for Grade R Grade 1 and Grade 2. According to the South African National Curriculum, there are eight learning areas². These include language, mathematics, natural sciences, technology, social sciences, arts and culture, life orientation, and economic and management sciences (Department of basic Education in RSA, Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9, 2002:13).

² A learning area is a field of knowledge, skills and values which has unique features as well as connections with other fields of knowledge and learning areas (Department of basic Education in RSA, Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9, 2002:13).

This statement also defines Foundation Phase learners to include Grade R to Grade 3 learners. The individuals within a township in this study therefore fell into the Foundation Phase category, together with their Foundation Phase teachers. Three of the eight mentioned learning areas are also relevant to the Foundation Phase. They include Literacy, Numeracy, and Life Skills. According to the formal teaching time allocations for the Foundation Phase, 25% of learners' time should be allocated to Life Skills (Department of basic Education in RSA, Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9, 2002:17).

Life Orientation has been defined as those skills that guide and equip learners for life and life's possibilities. Life Orientation was also designed to prepare learners for meaningful and successful living in a rapidly changing and transforming society. Life Orientation as a learning area is designed to develop skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that will empower learners to make informed decisions and take appropriate actions with regard to their health, social development, personal development, physical development, and their orientation to the world of work (Department of basic Education in RSA, Revised National Curriculum Statement Grades R-9, 2002:30).

Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:4), and the Learning Area Life Orientation of the National Curriculum (2002) for Grade R Grade 1 and Grade 2, all agree that life skills may make life easier, more productive and more satisfying for individuals through the realisation of their full potential in society together provided that they are accompanying gains in personal growth and optimal living. It is the opinion of Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:4) that life skills focus mainly on life skills as *coping mechanisms*, whereas the Learning Area Life Orientation defines life skills as more than coping mechanisms alone. For the purpose of this study, I am in agreement with Ebersöhn and Eloff (2006:4), and have described and explained life skills as coping mechanisms that learners (as individuals within a township) can use to cope with stressors during their transition from Grade R through to Grade 2.

1.8 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

"A paradigm is a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action" (Mertens, 1998:6).

Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:7) state that *paradigms* help to determine the particular questions that researchers ask about constructs. In this study, I have utilised an interpretivist and social constructivist qualitative approach. According to Mouton (1986, in De Vos, 1998:240), the term, *interpretive* refers to:

“...the fact that the aim of (qualitative) research is not to explain human behaviour in terms of universally valid laws or generalisation, but rather to understand and interpret the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human action” (De Vos, 1998:240).

My method in this research was not to describe the participants in terms of generalisations but rather in terms of their own, unique experiences. Interpretative research methods, according to Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:123), try to *“describe and interpret people’s feelings and experiences in human terms rather than through quantification and measurement.”*

For researchers in this tradition, research questions can be answered by extending the influence of the regular language used by the participants and by combining it with their expressions so that the researcher will be able to arrive at a clearer understanding of the participants’ social world (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999:123). Such researchers rely heavily on first-hand accounts because their purpose is to describe what they see in rich detail through the use of evocative language (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:124). Throughout the study I attempted to make sense of the meanings that the participants offered, and I took careful note of their different points of view, their experiences, and their understanding of their transition within their township from Grade R through to Grade 2, from an interpretivist point of view. In this way I focused very strongly on the perceptions and meanings of the participants rather than on my own (researcher’s) world. My constant focus was on the participants and their worlds and how they perceived them.

I also decided to also make use of a social constructivist paradigm because of the way in which Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:148) described this paradigm. Social constructivists strive to analyse how different signs and images from participants have the powers to generate particular representations on the part of

the participants and how certain objects underlie the experiences of the participants and objects in the study.

Social constructivists tend to use qualitative and interpretive methods, and are concerned with meaning in the sense that they attempt to demonstrate how certain understandings and experiences can be understood in terms of interpretive methods derived from larger discourses (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:48). Because our personal reality is socially constructed, we need a variety of mental constructions to apprehend it. Some of these mental constructions may even be in conflict with one another. It is possible to obtain knowledge about the way in which people understand their personal world through a careful and attentive study of the opinions, views, meanings, prejudices, events, assumptions and actions that people use to construct their meanings. In this view, there is no single truth or axiom that explains all things. Instead, we accept that human beings use different understandings and perceptions to make sense of their worlds and their experiences.

De Vos (1998:240) noted the similarities between social constructivists and interpretivists with regard to the theory of meaning or hermeneutics. The basic assumption of Mertens (1998:11) about the interpretivist or social constructivist paradigm is that both are socially constructed by people who are actively involved in their own epistemological processes. It is also necessary for research into understanding the complexity of the lived experiences from the point of view of those who live in it. There is, however, a difference between the two which I would like to emphasise. This difference is that social constructivists differ from interpretivists in that they believe that reality can be completely understood by arriving at an adequate understanding (interpretation) of the various meanings that participants attach to their life worlds (in this instance Grade 1 and Grade 2). Social constructivists, by contrast, interpret reality by attempting to understand the way in which people construct their own reality relative to their experiences of the world.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) classify the difference in research paradigms in terms of the distinctive ontology, epistemology and methodology that each employs. I make use of the same paradigmatic approaches in this study that De Vos (1998:246) used to elucidate these models.

The *ontological* approach that I utilised enabled me to obtain an in-depth understanding of how the world of the participants was constituted by the participants' personal experiences, ideas and feelings during the transition periods. I have also taken into account the multiple realities that are part of the experiential world of the participants in the research.

As far as my *epistemological* approach is concerned, I sought to understand the way in which participants arrived at a personal understanding and knowledge of their experiences through interacting and listening to what they had to say – as well as to what others involved in the research study told me. I was constantly aware during the process of the research that the kind of knowledge or understanding that I was looking for would only be acquired through the application of empathy. I also remained aware that I needed to understand the participants as individuals who know rather than objects who are known, and that my individual knowing as the researcher was of subsidiary importance to my quest to understand what the participants knew. Because qualitative research techniques are best suited to research of this kind, I made use of qualitative methods to gather data and to analyse and interpret the findings.

1.9 RESEARCH SITES AND SAMPLING

I conducted this study in Johannesburg in the Gauteng province of South Africa with a family that consisted of a father, a mother, individuals within a township (boys), and a younger sister and baby brother. The primary participants included the mother and the two four-year olds (who were four years old at the commencement of this study). They were monozygotic individuals within a township (boys). The other participants were their Grade R teacher, their Grade 1 teacher, and their Grade 2 teachers. By the time I commenced the fieldwork, the individuals within a township were 5 years of age and in Grade R, with the prospect of turning 6 at the end of their Grade R year. I commenced the fieldwork in September of 2009 when they were in their Grade R year, and tracked their transitions through to November of 2011 when they were in their Grade 2 year.

The experiences of the individuals within this township were integral to this study. I attempted to understand the stressors they might have experienced, why they

experienced those particular stressors, and how they coped with those stressors. Because the individuals within a township attended a government school, their teachers taught the national curriculum, which include the Learning Area Life Skills. I also examined how their teachers taught life skills to their learners as well as the differences and similarities between life skills and coping strategies. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the individuals within a township's mother and teachers so that I could acquire a more in-depth understanding of my research theme and the worlds inhabited by the participants. I used creative, age-appropriate worksheets and play activities as the main source of collecting data about the individuals within a township. I undertook most of this research at the family's home, which was their natural environment. I also visited their school for the interviews that I had scheduled with the teachers who were involved with the individuals in a township. I supplemented these activities with observation sessions in the classroom and on the playground.

One of the reasons why I selected the particular participating individuals in a township was, firstly, because the mother of the individuals within a township willingly offered to allow me to engage her children for my research during an informal conversation about my research theme. My second reason for choosing these particular individuals as participants was as follows: because the two participants were individuals within a township from the same family, and because they lived under the same conditions in the same environment and background, there was a strong likelihood that I would be able to obtain data from this unique situation that may relate to the observations of other researchers who had explored parallel situations. In a study undertaken by DiLalla and Mullineaux (2008:108), the researchers noted that the processes that occurred during the transition might be especially relevant to co-individuals within a township, not only because of the parent/child and teacher/child effect that they had on one another, but also because of the way in which siblings are understood to affect one another. These researchers also noted that not only do the participating individuals in the parent/child, teacher/child and sibling relationships, affect one another, but that individuals within a township may have a greater effect on one another because they are of the same age and share a special bond of attachment.

I was therefore very careful to take the effect that individuals within a township had on one another into account during this study. The transactional process thus had implications for the ways in which the individuals within a township interacted with one another as well as with other people. These interactions have an important influence on the children's behaviours and their experiences in the classroom. But because individuals within a township are the central concern of this study, the findings of this study focused specifically on individuals within a township and were not generalised.

1.10 RESEARCH DESIGN

Strauss and Corbin (1990:17, in De Vos, 1998:240), state that *qualitative research* means different things to different people. In this study, the qualitative research in the case study research design have been conducted from both an interpretivist and social constructivist point of view.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:181) states that a case study provides a unique example of real people behaving in real situations, and that this enables readers better to understand ideas more clearly than when such ideas are presented merely as abstract theories or principles. Cohen *et al.* (2000:182) also argues that case studies portray what it is like to be in a particular situation. Case study researchers are thus able to portray realities from close range and offer precise descriptions of these realities. Denzin and Lincoln (2000:443) have noted that a case study is not a methodological choice, but rather a choice of what is to be studied. In this study, the researcher studied the case itself, with particular emphasis on the transition of individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2.

While a case study draws attention to the question of what can be learned or understood about a single case, it can also be defined as two entities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:443). First of all it may be understood as a process of inquiry about the case and secondly a process of inquiry about the product of that entity.

Leedy and Ormrod (2001:149), by contrast, define a case study as the in-depth study of a particular individual, programme or event for a defined period of time. For this study I selected as my participants two preschool individuals within a township

for a period of three years while they were passing through their transition from preschool through to Grade 2.

In my role as a case study researcher, I looked particularly for both the expected and unexpected, and common and uncommon features, although, in the end, the research describes more unexpected and unusual findings than one might expect (Stouffer, 1941, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:447). I studied the participants intensively in their natural worlds, in their home environment and their school environment, and focused particularly on their activities and the way they behaved in their natural worlds. I also gathered data about their historical backgrounds. I described the physical settings in which the research took place (their home and school environments) in great detail. I also took into account the participants' economic and social backgrounds as well as the differences and similarities in their personalities. In my role as the researcher, I also looked at other cases which might shed light on my own case study (Stouffer, 1941, in Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:447).

I took the following factors into account when undertaking this case study (Denscombe, 2003:30): I focused strongly on one aspect of the theme that I was investigating, namely the transition of the individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2. My main purpose in doing this was to illuminate the general by examining the details of the particular. I studied certain features in a qualitatively detailed way so that I would be able to amass the kind of valuable information and unique insights that would make the research an in-depth study. My concentration on *relationships* and *processes* were essential features of my method throughout the duration of the study. By making use of a case study design, I was able to amass sufficient detail to unravel some of the complexities of the situations I encountered. The discipline of engaging in a case study enabled me to deal with the case as a whole even as I was attempting to elucidate how some of the parts affected one another. Another advantage of undertaking a case study is that it gives one various opportunities to explain why certain events occurred.

I therefore studied the participants in their *natural settings*, which included their home and school environments. There were certain advantages that derived from studying the individuals in a township in their natural settings. These included the fact that they were more comfortable in their natural settings. I assumed that they

felt more confident in their own environments and settings because these were places in which they had already established relationships. I also used a *variety of sources and multiple types of data* to shed additional light on my investigation. Some of these techniques that provided additional data included participant observation techniques, the collection of documents, the conduct of semi-structured interviews, and age-appropriate activities with the individuals involved. In addition to this, I used field notes, transcriptions and audiovisual material in the form of photographs as additional sources from which to mine useful data.

Nisbet and Watt (1984:184) arrived at the following conclusions about the strengths and weaknesses of case studies, all of which I took into account in this study. Firstly, they suggest that the findings about participants can be more easily understood by interested readers and observers when they are written up in everyday, non-professional language. When participants speak for themselves, they are more immediately intelligible. Because the main focus of my study was on young individuals within a township (boys), various unique features emerged that may have been lost if I had utilised a quantitative data collection method. I noted above that a quantitative data collection method could have offered insight into other, similar situations and cases as well as the possibility of shedding light on the interpretations contained in similar cases. A vital advantage of the case study format was that it could be undertaken by a single researcher without the assistance of a full research team. This particular research format allowed me to notice and take account of any unanticipated events or uncontrolled variables.

I also took into account the known weaknesses of case studies such as those described by Nisbet and Watt (1984:184). One such weakness is that it did not allow me to make generalisations from my findings. But my goal as a researcher was not to arrive at any specific truth about the situation, but rather to undertake an in-depth study that would be rich and layered in detail and nuance. Another weakness particular to this case was the fact that its complexity made it impossible for me to crosscheck facts and assertions simply because I was working on my own. I compensated for this by endeavouring to arrive at findings, to analyse themes and to inscribe my findings in a truthful and ethical manner by using member checks, conducting an intensive literature study, and by consulting extensively with existing experts in the field.

1.11 DATA COLLECTION

“Everybody has the skills required to do interpretive research, but to do it well one needs to turn those into specialized research skills”

(Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999).

The major sources for data collection in case studies include observations, interviews, secondary analysis, and audiovisual materials (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:149). I made use of all of these data-collecting resources and strategies in this study, and spent a great deal of time with the participants so that I would be in regular contact with them.

My main interest during my interactions with the participants was how these individuals within a township experienced their transition from preschool through to Grade 2 and the meanings that they ascribed to these experiences. I also bore in mind the fact that the same actions and situations could well have been interpreted differently by different researchers. As the researcher, I strove to arrive at interpretations that were also valid for the participants concerned (Jupp, 1989:121, in De Vos, 1998:279). I also took the following factors into account when observing the participants (a more detailed description of each of these will follow later in the study): the natural setting, the duration of the study, holism, empathy, and insight (De Vos, 1998:280).

My main data collection activities included creative worksheets as well as age-appropriate activities with the individuals within a township. I conducted semi-structured interviews with the primary participants' mother, as well as their preschool and primary school teachers at various junctures during the three-year period of field work. I used these interviews to gain a detailed picture of the participants' beliefs as well as their perceptions and the meanings they attributed to the themes in which I was primarily interested (De Vos, Strydom, Fouché & Delpont, 1998:302). The main reason for spending so much of my limited time with the participants' mother, teachers and schools, was that it allowed me to obtain a holistic view of how the individuals within a township experienced the transitions in which I was interested. Such a focus also prevented me from becoming sidetracked by observations of other children in their school

Since I regarded the participants as the experts on their subjects, feelings and experiences, I gave them as many opportunities as possible to tell their own stories. My questions in interviews, for example, were nearly always open-ended. The interviews were carefully recorded and audio-visually taped for future transcription and retrieval of every detail and nuance. Another strategy was that I used the time immediately after every interview to capture my field notes so that I would lose as little data as possible. I therefore recorded my observations before talking about them. My field notes included the things that I heard, saw, experienced, and thought about during the course of the interviews with the participants. My observations were recorded verbally on audiotape, and I also used photographs to illustrate certain aspects in this study such as worksheets and the activities produced by the individuals within a township. By using photographs, I was able to enrich my conclusions with visual evidence (De Vos, 1998:326).

1.12 DATA ANALYSIS

During data analysis, a researcher becomes intimately involved with the participants and with the data that has been generated. This is one of the main reasons why analysing qualitative data can be so challenging as well as a highly creative activity (De Vos, 1998:334).

Researchers who use an interpretivist paradigm mostly prefer to make use of inductive data analysis (Jansen, in Maree, 2007:3). Because of the requirements of the interpretivist method, I included more than one reality, or, in other words, *multiple realities*, in this study.

I shall now discuss the strategies that I used to analyse the data that was amassed for this study. These strategies are listed by Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:141), and include *familiarisation and immersion*. This meant in effect that I had to immerse myself in the material as thoroughly as possible by intensively and repeatedly reviewing all the texts, in addition to living in my own reality. I read and reread all the transcriptions while making notes, brainstorming, and drawing diagrams.

I used the inductive method which implies arriving at propositions by examining great quantities of data. By using this method, I established the emerging organising principles of my conclusions.

Coding was another key strategy that I used in the study. As I developed themes, I disaggregated the data and split it into ever-smaller secondary themes by making use of different colours for the specific themes, along with numbers for the secondary themes that I identified. Since this kind of coding process is descriptive, I continuously compared and contrasted the identified themes so that I could optimise the descriptive power of the categories.

By using *elaboration* (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:141), I was able to capture the finer nuances of meaning, and this allowed me to refine my exploration of the themes more carefully. This step also required me to revise my coding system until I had located the most significant possible insights for the study.

In the final step of data analysis, I made use of *interpretation and checking* (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:141). I completed my analysis for this study by making use of categories with various themes that fitted all the data that had been gathered after I had completed all of the steps mentioned above.

1.13 RIGOUR OF THE STUDY

Because the sample for this study was small, and because I had no intention of generalising my findings, I did not undertake any of the steps required for generalisability. Instead, I strove to create the potential for *transferability* in the study. In order to make this possible, I included rich and detailed descriptions of the research context, as well as the participants' perceptions and their experiences.

As an interpretivist and social constructivist researcher, I did not assume that I was investigating a static and unchanging reality. Instead I assumed that the participants might have behaved differently and have had different opinions if the context were different.

I also set great store by *dependability* in this study. As with transferability, I aspired to *dependability* in this study primarily through my own rich and detailed descriptions (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 1999:63). My original audio recordings of each session and transcripts helped to add depth to this study as I listened to them again and again while checking the accuracy of the transcriptions.

Another activity that I took into account was Mason's (2002:7) *active reflexivity*. As researcher, I understood my role in the research process to be that I needed to compile rich and detailed descriptions of what the participants experienced in the transition of the individuals in a township from Grade R through to Grade 2. I therefore constantly reflected upon my actions and my role as the researcher in the context of the whole project.

Prolonged engagement is another important strength in this study. Because of the duration of the research, I was able to obtain a wealth of rich and in-depth details about what the participants thought and felt.

1.14 MY ROLE AS RESEARCHER

For the purposes of this study, I reflected critically on my role as the researcher (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). I entered into a committed and collaborative partnership with the participants for the purpose of collecting and analysing the data I received from them in order to arrive at a nuanced understanding of their transition experiences. Because I conducted the fieldwork for this research over a period of three years with the participants, I was able to establish the kind of solid and trusting relationship with them and their caregivers that were essential for the success of this study. I attempted at all times to be a sensitive observer as I observed the participants in their natural settings, which they mostly experienced as safe and comfortable environments. My duty as a researcher was to record the phenomena I observed as faithfully as possible, even though I became devoted to the participants in this study.

Because of my personal affection for the participants, I had to be continuously aware of my own possible prejudices and distortions. I therefore read and reread the findings and reflected on them before committing them to writing. I also raised

additional questions when they arose and incorporated the questions and answers into the record of the analysis of the phenomena where appropriate. My role as researcher also compelled me for ethical reasons fiercely to protect the anonymity of the participants throughout the research process. I also therefore needed to tell them that they were free to withdraw from the project if ever they felt like doing so. Finally, my first duty as a responsible researcher was always to respect their desires and wishes and to represent the truth as I saw it comprehensibly and with due sensitivity.

1.15 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

I also committed myself to the ethical conduct of this study, as it is embodied in the statement of Terre Blanche and Durrheim (1999:66) when they noted that *“ethical concerns should be an integral part of the planning and implementation of research”*.

The reason for committing oneself to ethical guidelines right from the beginning of the study is to protect the welfare and rights of everyone involved in the research. I particularly committed myself to respecting the *autonomy* of all the participants, especially the two young boys who were members of a township and my main objects of research. Their voluntary participation gave them the absolute freedom to withdraw from the process at any stage without incurring any kind of negative penalty or reaction. The terms of the ethical agreement also gave them the right to refuse to answer any question or participate in any activity. They were fully aware of this at all stages of the process. Because interviews formed an integral part of my research method, I was careful to schedule all interviews by prior arrangement at reasonable times that would suit all concerned.

The ethical requirements of *confidentiality and anonymity* required that the identity of all the participants, as well as all information or data that might be gathered, would be sought and collated under conditions that preserved their confidentiality and anonymity. I duly told all the participants that their identities as well as data and conclusions I collected would only ever be revealed in such a form that would protect their anonymity and confidentiality at all times. I have been careful to implement these guarantees at all times.

Because of the ethical requirement of *informed consent*, I was obliged to obtain the free consent of the participants to participate in the research process at all times. In addition to this, all the participants were carefully informed about the research process as well as what I hoped to achieve thereby. Constant dialogue between myself and the participants also assured that all of those involved were well informed about the process of the inquiry for as long as they were participating.

The ethical requirement of *non-maleficence* required me not to harm the participants or any other person involved in the research process in any way at all. In order to comply with this principle, the participants were never asked to participate in any activity for which they were not competent. I was fully aware that, because of their age, the individuals within a township were still in a specific developmental stage that is characteristic of their age group. Because I was aware that their involvement in the research took place at what was often a stressful time for the participants, I engaged professionals who were immediately available to assist them if necessary. In the event, it was not necessary to make use of this professional help at any time during the course of the study.

The issue of *trust* as an ethical consideration was also foundational to the pursuit of this research. The trust that developed gradually between myself and the participants throughout the interviews and during the in-depth data collection period was not pursued for my personal material benefit or gain.

I was also very careful to design research that would be *beneficial* to the participants, the other researchers, and to the interests of society as a whole. By including the participants' personal experiences and different opinions and attitudes in the findings, I was able to suggest and expand upon useful information and themes that I knew would be useful for future children and parents in the same situation. I was also certain that the life skills that I helped to facilitate in the participants during the transition of the individuals within a township from Grade R through to Grade 2, would be *beneficial* to them, both in the present and in the future as coping mechanisms which might enhance the quality of their lives in difficult circumstances.

Another ethical consideration that I took into account was that I would *publish the findings* as a true reflection of what had actually occurred during the research, and that I would not manipulate the data or the conclusions to establish an enhanced but inaccurate reflection of what had occurred.

1.16 POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

One of the limitations of this study was the fact that, for this particular case study, the primary and secondary participants numbered only seven people. Out of these seven participants, the individuals within a township (the two boys) were the main participants. The fact that the main participants in the research were individuals within a township, limited me as the researcher from generalising my findings to children who were not individuals within a township. While this inability to draw generalised conclusions represented a limitation, the main purpose of the study was not to make generalisations, but rather to share the available in-depth meanings and experiences of the participants with whomever might benefit from them. Another limitation was the fact that the fieldwork lasted for three years. Because of this, I might well have lost my participants because of any number of unanticipated circumstances such as possible trauma or the removal of the principal family to another inaccessible location. Another possible limitation of this study was that I might have unavoidably become too closely involved as a researcher in the lives of the participants because of the close relationship I was obliged to develop with them over an extended period of time.

1.17 LAYOUT OF CHAPTERS

The chapters for this thesis were organised as follows:

CHAPTER 1: OVERVIEW AND RATIONALE

Chapter 1 provides the background to the study. This chapter contains a general overview of the study together with an introduction and the rationale for the study. This chapter sets out the research problem, the research questions, the implications of the paradigm, as well as definitions of the concepts used. It also contains a preliminary discussion of the research design and the methodology.

CHAPTER 2: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter details the conceptual framework of the study, together with an in-depth exploration and discussion of the literature.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is described in detail in this chapter. The data collection, data analysis and interpretation methods that were introduced in detail in Chapter 1 are discussed in further depth in this chapter.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter 4 presents the data and the format of the data, together with my analysis of the data and the findings. The research findings are summarised in this chapter.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter offers the main conclusions of the study. In this chapter the findings are further explained and correlated with the conceptual framework for this study and are related to the research questions that were outlined in Chapter 1. This chapter also makes recommendations for further research that could be usefully be undertaken in this field.

