CHAPTER 1

General Introduction

"The sign of intelligent people is their ability to control emotions by the application of reason".

- Marya Mannes

1.1   INTRODUCTION

One of the unique features of humans is their reliance on emotions to form social bonds and build complex socio-cultural structures. This is confirmed by Turner and Stets (2005:1) who postulate that:

> "with just a moment's thought, it immediately becomes evident that emotions are the 'glue' binding people together and generating commitments to larger scale social and cultural structures. Experience, behaviour, interaction, and organization are connected to the mobilization and expression of emotions".

Our hurried lives and the high expectance for success place an enormous amount of strain on daily performance. The pressure on children in this sense does not differ much from that on adults. Cohen (2001:4) echoes this statement in his indication that how children feel about themselves and others, colours and shapes their ability to learn. Their social emotional capacities powerfully affect, and even determine, their actions in terms of their ability to listen and communicate; to concentrate; to recognize, understand, and solve problems; to cooperate; to modulate their emotional states; to become self-motivating; and to resolve conflicts adaptively.

The significance of emotional capacities, in this sense, is elucidated by Stein (2009:13) in his indication that people are judged by their actions rather than by how much they know. He illustrates this by stating that people who care about others are generally valued higher than someone who is, for instance, able to memorize the periodic table. Children need to make this connection. Rothbard and Sheese (2007:331) conclude that emotions signal the need to change or adjust our behaviour in the face of environmental challenges and therefore function to help us

realize our short-term and long-term intrapersonal and interpersonal needs. Linking the inner world to the outer experience thus enables awareness through emotional knowledge.

The way in which children express their emotions, according to Blom (2004:138), bears relation to their personal processes and manifests more in behaviour than in verbal communication. Violet Oaklander, specialist Gestalt play therapist, found that children are likely to suppress their negative emotions, but it is then observed in their behaviour (Oaklander, 1988:139).

A child's negative emotional experiences may therefore manifest as disobedience, anger, anxiety attacks and emotional episodes in the child who is not emotionally educated. Emotional education is defined by Crawspeth (2005:49-72) as: "(i) becoming aware of what is happening in our emotional process and (ii) learning how to influence this happening". The educator who is thus not equipped in the field of emotional awareness can then in turn gravely misinterpret this kind of behaviour and their handling of the child can do more harm than good. The importance of a well equipped educator is confirmed by Maritz (2008), an educational psychologist involved with children in a children's home in the Limpopo Province, who states that "educators who are not sensitive to the emotional needs of children, especially traumatized children, may administer additional trauma and strengthen the negative emotions within the child". She has further mentioned that aggression is one of the main negative reactions regarding emotional disturbances that she has to deal with. She experienced noticeable improvement in positive behaviour once she and a child worked through emotional uncertainties, which emphasizes the importance of emotional awareness skills. According to Maritz (2008) this aspect is especially important for children in the middle childhood developmental phase (age six to twelve), which will be the target group in this study. Maritz (2008) notes that children between the ages of six and twelve years (middle childhood developmental phase) experience almost everything they are involved in on an emotional level and that emotions are therefore the most intense experience for children in this developmental stage. This is supported by Bronson (2000:227) who indicates that their [children in the middle childhood developmental phase] development towards the end of this stage changes from being "emotionally-focused" to "problem-focused".

Brain development of the young child is a further aspect of utmost importance if one aims to comprehend the extent of healthy development in developing children. Talay-Ongan and Ap

(2005:123) point to the findings of studies with children who experienced sexual and physical abuse during the ages of one to six years, who endured these circumstances for at least six years before they were placed in foster care. It was found that:

- many children recovered from post-traumatic-stress when they found themselves in nurturing environments, in others there was evidence of alterations in the physiology of their fear-stress system, similar to conditions where high levels of cortisol was released.
- with neural-imaging comparisons with healthy and intact children, the abused children had considerably smaller brain-volumes, with the extent of damage proportional to the duration of abuse.

Bearing these findings in mind it is evident that the educator may serve as a daily nurturer to the child residing in circumstances of maltreatment and neglect. The educator may thus well be the difference in this child's capacity for emotional recovery and healthy brain potential. The huge role of brain development and maltreatment in the shaping of children is extensively discussed in Chapter 4.

Knowledge of emotions as well as the effect of emotional experiences is thus crucial when dealing with the child in the middle childhood developmental phase. Rathus (2011:425) indicate that, children become more capable of taking the role or perspective of another person in the middle childhood developmental phase. Lanius, Vermetten and Pain (2010:280) designate that this inferential ability about the emotional states of others depends on the understanding of one's own emotional experience. In this way children or adults who lack emotional awareness about themselves will also have difficulty understanding the emotional expression of others.

If children are allowed to recognize their emotions as a natural part of their human nature, they will be enabled to learn skills to express emotions in a healthy and socially acceptable manner (Blom, 2004:138). Optimal emotional knowledge can hence explain psychological reactions to specific anxieties and fears in the child's life, which result in the child owning it and therefore obtaining better control over it (Geldard & Geldard, 2002:48; Blom 2004:15).

Emotional education, according to Cohen (2001:3), refers to learning skills, understandings and values that enhance the ability to "read" oneself and others and then utilize this information to become a flexible problem solver and creative learner. Weare (2004:3) elaborates on this in his indication that some key emotional competencies are essential for optimal development, namely self-understanding, understanding and managing emotions, understanding social situations, and building relationships. The interrelation of these aspects is an important issue in this study, for it is the researcher's opinion that the total being of the child in the middle childhood developmental phase can be enhanced through emotional awareness, as emotional instability and insecurity similarly affect the child's overall existence.

Jameson (2004) refers to research done by The USA Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), a movement focussed on research and development of Social and Emotional Learning, which has found that:

> Children with social and emotional competence are most likely to succeed academically, have a sense of well-being in their personal lives, and act as contributors to their communities. They know what their strengths and challenges are and are optimistic about the future; they have meaningful relationships and maintain happy lives. They are able to set and achieve goals and solve problems effectively. They are able to empathize with and show respect for others, appreciate diversity, and live in accordance with their values, making positive contributions to their communities.

The study, which focuses on the development and evaluation of an emotional awareness program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase in a South African educational setting, may consequently be of value to children in all of the above-mentioned facets of their lives.

It seems thus as if emotional education should receive the same amount of attention as cognitive education in the educational system. It implies that educators should therefore have knowledge regarding emotional awareness to ensure that the whole child is developed and educated. This is confirmed by Coetzee (2008), who states that primary school educators, now more than ever, need to be equipped with knowledge on the development of emotional and social skills, and an understanding of the emotional behaviour of their learners. Coetzee (2008) emphasizes that he and his personnel are in desperate need of education in this field.

In foregoing research to this study, conducted by Knoetze (2006), educators' knowledge of emotional awareness was investigated and it was found that educators were of the opinion that the development of emotional awareness as a developmental task in the middle childhood developmental phase is significant. Research results indicated further that respondents were of the opinion that they do not have sufficient knowledge of children's emotional awareness and means to develop it in their classes. A 100% response was received for a need in further development and education in this field (Knoetze, 2006:109).

The development and implementation of a program that will enhance emotional awareness and social capacities in the primary school learner would consequently benefit not only the learner, but the educators and school as a whole. Weare (2004:13) indicates that many large-scale reviews of research in this area have concluded that programs which teach social and emotional competencies can result in gains that are central to the goals of schools. These goals include improved school atmospheres, learning that is more effective, better behaviour, higher school attendance, higher motivation, higher morale of students and educators, and better results for students and schools. Bartlett and Burton (2003:22) agree with this statement and identified four aspects that indicate successful education of the developing child, namely the development of a healthy child, a strong child, a competent child and a child skilled in communication techniques.

The focus of this study is therefore be on the development and evaluation of the effectiveness of an emotional awareness program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase within the educational system. The study is undertaken from a Gestalt therapeutic perspective. The Gestalt perspective approaches the child in entirety and offers comprehensive guidelines for emotional well-being. Ray (2011:54) states that Violet Oaklander is noted as the founder of Gestalt play therapy and the most prolific author on its use. Oaklander (1988:194) indicates that once children understand their needs, they can start in the direction of fulfilment of that need. The Gestalt approach and its applicability in this study are extensively discussed in Chapter 2.

1.2   PROBLEM FORMULATION

Chakraborty and Konar (2009:10) state that a portion of the human cortical and sub-cortical brain system is found to be responsible for our emotional expression. These emotional reactions change and develop through experiences and situations, which occur during an individual's life.

Maag (1996:127) provides an excellent comparison applicable to this study and therefore it is included in this discussion even though it is from an older source. He states that emotional and psychological sensations are confusing in comparison to physiological feelings and illustrates it with the example that when the body experiences a feeling of dehydration it develops a feeling of thirst. Thirst is not a positive feeling and an instinctive reaction indicates to the individual that he needs to have a drink. Nobody needs therapy for thirst, because an instinctive physiological reaction takes care of the problem. However, there is a contrast between the ease with which physiological needs are interpreted and reacted on, versus an individual's ability to act with knowledge and understanding on emotions or psychological needs.

This simplified example clearly illustrates the need for emotional awareness. Heightened emotional awareness will enable children to recognize the sensation of specific emotions in their body and mind. The child can then naturally react to the emotion from grounded knowledge and awareness of specific emotions and its effect on the body. Awareness of emotions will furthermore result in a less traumatic or threatening experience of negative emotions as a result of heightened wellness and the ability to function more effectively through self-regulation (Oaklander, 1988:122). Graham's (2005:161-167) cognitive behavioural program for sexually abused children points to the successful way in which emotional skills can be taught in the same manner that cognitive skills are. The opposite would thus have the effect that optimal cognitive training without emotional and social skills can prevent the child from developing into a responsible and productive human being. Bronson (2000:59) corroborates this argument in her findings that cognitive developmental theorists have associated the control of emotions and behaviour with overall cognitive development.

In a study conducted by Knoetze (2006) it is found that educators also recognize emotional awareness as an important building block for the healthy development of children and they value

the role the educational system has to play in the development of emotional awareness. These findings are supported by Kincheloe, Burzstyn and Steinberg (2004:106), who point out that resent research regarding the interconnectedness of emotions, thinking and learning recognize that there is no separation of these constructs. They further stress the importance of upholding the rightful and necessary inclusion of emotions in learning.

A further aspect of importance in this matter is observed by Eric Jensen (in Mortiboys, 2005:29) in his indication that "the 'state' you are in is the most important factor determining readiness to learn". He further postulates that "all learning is 'state' dependent. The 'state' you are in is determined by the collection of emotions you are feeling". The classroom situation renders a great deal of potential to induce feelings which do not create a "learning state". Tileston (2004:32) confirmed this opinion in her study regarding the motivation of learners, when she found that it becomes easier to work with learners when they feel safe enough to discuss their emotions. The emphasis is thus not only on understanding the emotional needs of learners and being able to identify and address it, but also on creating an emotionally safe classroom environment in the process.

Kuscke, Riggs and Greenberg in Zins, Weissberg, Wang and Walberg (2004:172) state that social and emotional competence has become as critical for the basic knowledge repertoire of all children as reading, writing and arithmetic. Kuscke, Riggs and Greenberg in Zins et al. (2004:172) elaborate that educators acknowledge that they have little background or established strategies to deal with these competencies and these authors thus emphasise that it is necessary to provide detailed lessons, materials and instructions to them.

This was also confirmed in the study conducted by Knoetze (2006), where educators expressed the opinion that emotional awareness has an important role to play and indicated that there exists a need for development and training in this field, but confirmed that they were not equipped to fulfil this need.

The integration of social and emotional learning into school curriculums is thus the ideal solution and is viewed by Utne O'Brien et al. (2008) as a vital intervention in order to prepare children for life in the twenty first century. Shriver and Weissberg (in Utne O'Brien et al., 2008), leaders of

The Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), point out that the choice between academic and social-emotional learning is a false one: "The two kinds of learning are intimately connected. This supposes that promoting students' social and emotional skills plays a critical role in improving their academic performance". They further indicate that there is solid evidence to support this statement in research synthesis of over 300 studies, conducted by Joseph Durlak of Loyola University and Roger Weissberg of CASEL and the University of Illinois (Utne O'Brien et al., 2008). These studies indicate that social and emotional learning programs significantly improve students' academic performance. The study shows, for example, that an average student enrolled in a social and emotional learning program ranks at least ten percentage points higher on achievement tests than students who do not participate in such programs.

These studies on emotional learning were done internationally. The researcher could not find an indication of empirical research focussing specifically on the skill of awareness of different emotions, its effect on physical and psychological functioning and appropriate ways to positively act on these emotions within the educational system in South Africa. Studies regarding emotional development for children done within the South African context are studies focussing on emotional intelligence as a broader concept of being emotionally capable and equipped (Blom, 2000; Le Roux & de Klerk, 2004; Vermeulen, 1999). It seems thus as if there is currently a need for an appropriate learning program to enhance this fundamental starting point towards growth into an emotionally intelligent person, namely developing the emotional awareness of children in the middle childhood developmental phase within the educational system. Such a program, which could be included as part of the normal school day and learners' learning material will thus prepare children emotionally better for life (Utne O'Brien et al., 2008) and educators will also be equipped to better understand the emotional needs of children and be able to identify and address it because they will receive the material and content in a program already applicable in their classrooms.

Coetzee (2008) indicates that the current focus is more on all kinds of creative forms of discipline, because educators are losing control over a large group of learners. These learners are labelled as misbehaved, uncontrollable or delinquent and some of them end up in schools of industry. Less attention is given to emotional education; hence emotional awareness has the potential to constructively enhance positive behaviour. The need for the emotional education of learners within

the educational context was highlighted by Coetzee (2008) and is supported by Cohen (2001:3) in the statement that there is a growing body of research and practice that underscores that learning how to "read" ourselves and the reactions of others is as important as learning how to read words and numbers.

Education in emotional awareness is a new concept compared to conventional education of cognitive learning. Successful emotional awareness in learners depends on educators being equipped to teach emotional awareness to their learners, and this is not the case in the current South African educational system (Knoetze, 2006:121). This study's findings indicated that educators view emotional awareness as:

- significant in children's development;
- an important area to attain knowledge on;
- an aspect that stands in relation with problem behaviour, academic achievements, relationships, self-knowledge, health and psycho somatic ailments of learners;
- an aspect which ought to be more intensively addressed within the educational system;
- just as important as cognitive education; and
- a subject on which they do not have sufficient knowledge and express the willingness to be educated in this regard.

Jameson (2004) supports these findings in his indication that children's emotional knowledge enhances their development on all levels of their being.

The development of an emotional awareness program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase for utilization in the South African educational system will thus fill a need and an educational gap within the current educational system. The study will depart from the viewpoint that emotional reactions are born into the most primitive limbic part of the brain and have an influence on all levels of a person's being. Being aware of specific emotions and their effect on a person's life will promote a favourable understanding of and reaction to specific situations. Children in the middle childhood developmental phase experience almost everything in their existence on an emotional level. Heightened emotional awareness will enable them to recognize the sensation of specific emotions in their body and mind and act accordingly.

Awareness of emotions will thus have the potential to result in a less negative or threatening experience for children and increase their ability to self-regulate to a balanced existence.

The intention is to teach emotional skills in the same manner that the educational system teaches cognitive skills. Emotional awareness of learners could contribute to a more positive classroom atmosphere which is especially important in the promotion of a learning 'state'. Learners will be in a better 'state' if they feel emotionally safe and secure in the educator's presence, as well as in the group that they are part of. Integrating social and emotional learning into school curriculums is vital to the preparation of children for life in the twenty first century.

The need to enhance the emotional awareness of children in the middle childhood developmental phase will thus not only fill a research and educational gap, but will also improve the academic, social and emotional performance of learners in a primary school in the South African context. In order to fulfil this need, the focus of the study is to develop, implement and evaluate an emotional awareness program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase meant for utilization within the educational system.

1.3   GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

The goal and objectives of this study follow below.

1.3.1   Goal

To develop, implement and evaluate an emotional awareness program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase for utilization in the South African educational system.

1.3.2   Objectives

- To conceptualize emotional awareness theoretically with specific emphasis on children in the middle childhood developmental phase, in the context of the educational system.

- To develop an emotional awareness program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase for utilization in classroom context.
- To train an educator in implementing the Emotional Awareness Program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase within the classroom context.
- To implement the Emotional Awareness Program in a classroom context, by the trained educator.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the EA program through measuring the responses of the learners (respondents).
- To make recommendations based on the research findings, regarding the enhancement of the EA program for learners in the middle childhood developmental phase within the educational system.

Against this background the following hypotheses were guiding the study.

1.4   HYPOTHESIS

Barker (2003:206) defines a hypothesis as a tentative proposition that describes a possible relationship among facts that can be observed and measured. Kumar (2005:73) elaborates on this definition by stating that a hypothesis brings clarity, specificity and focus to a research problem, but is not essential for a study. Balnaves and Caputi (2001:60) add that a hypothesis is a statement about the relationship between constructs.

The following main and sub-hypotheses are applicable in the context of this study:

Main hypothesis: If an emotional awareness program is implemented for children in the middle childhood developmental phase within the educational system, then the learners' level of emotional functioning will be enhanced.

Sub-hypotheses:

- If an emotional awareness program is implemented for children in the middle childhood developmental phase within the educational system, their ability to be **in contact with their emotions** will be enhanced.

- If an emotional awareness program is implemented for children in the middle childhood developmental phase within the educational system, their ability to **discriminate between different emotions** will be increased.

- If an emotional awareness program is implemented for children in the middle childhood developmental phase within the educational system, they will gain the ability to **verbalize and "own"** their emotions.

1.5 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher utilized a quantitative research approach in the execution of this study, because a structured approach to inquiry was used in the researcher's aim to objectively measure the effectiveness of an emotional awareness program (EA program). The researcher wanted to measure the effectiveness of an EA program on specific variables, namely the learners' ability to:

- be in contact with their emotions;
- discriminate between different emotions;
- verbalize and "own" their emotions.

This study resorts within the description of applied research. It was undertaken to acquire new knowledge, and primarily directed towards practical objectives. It focused on a problem in practice, namely a need for an emotional awareness program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase that was scientifically tested in the South African education system.

In the context of applied research, intervention research was applicable in this study as it aimed to develop technology, or technological items, useful to the educational profession. The sub-type of intervention research, namely design and development, best encompassed the researcher's intent to

design and develop technology, namely an EA program for children in the middle childhood developmental phase, to implement the program (intervention) and to evaluate the effectiveness thereof for further implementation within the educational system.

A quasi-experimental design, namely the comparison group pre-test– post-test design (Schneider, Gruman & Coutts, 2005:46), was utilized because the dependent variable (emotional awareness) was measured (pre-test) when no independent variable (EA program) was present. An independent variable was subsequently introduced (EA program), followed by repeating the measurement (post-test) of the dependent variable (emotional awareness) for comparison between the two measurements. The comparison group received both the pre-test and the post-test but did not receive the independent variable (EA program). Measures of the pre- and post-tests of both the experimental and comparison group regarding the dependent variable were compared in order to evaluate the impact of the independent variable (EA program).

The population in this research study was learners in the middle childhood developmental phase, namely grade three learners between the age of eight and nine years, involved in primary education in the Waterberg district of the Limpopo Province.

A sample of 49 learners in the middle childhood developmental phase of a specific primary school in the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province was selected. An experimental and a comparison group according to the following criteria were selected:

- **Location:** A primary school in the Waterberg District of the Limpopo Province.
- **Level of education:** Grade three learners
- **Manner of education:** Learners who spent the most of their school day in the presence of the same educator.
- **Age:** Children between eight and nine years.
- **Language:** Afrikaans-speaking learners.

The school included in the study was selected through utilization of availability sampling. In order to enhance objective sampling, purposive sampling was utilized for the sampling of the classes involved. This study needed to be conducted with learners in a specific developmental phase,

namely the developmental phase and more specifically grade three learners between eight and nine years of age. It is also aimed at the educational system and in a classroom context to determine the effect of the Emotional Awareness Program on the respondents. Grade three is thus the grade purposively sampled for inclusion in this study.

The selected primary school had four grade three classes consisting of three Afrikaans-speaking classes and one English-speaking class. In order to achieve optimal comparison it was important to utilize groups of the same language. Three grade three Afrikaans-speaking classes were thus available and a random selection, according to the simple random sampling method, was undertaken to determine which class would serve as the experimental group and which one as the comparison group.

The data of the study was collected with the *Levels of Emotional Awareness Scale for Children (LEAS-C)* (see Appendix A), a standardised questionnaire developed by Dr. Richard Lane and Dr. Jane Bajgar (Lane & Bajgar, 2003). The fact that a standardised questionnaire was used annulled the purpose of a pilot test as the validity and reliability of the questionnaire was already tested. The questionnaire was developed for children and the content therefore fully comprehendible for eight year old learners. The questionnaire and its scoring measurements were translated from English to Afrikaans (due to the respondents being Afrikaans-speaking) with the permission of its developers (see Appendix B). Dr. Lane indicated that translated questionnaires were already successfully utilized in other languages as well. The questionnaire was completed as a pre-test by the experimental and comparison group of grade three learners. The questionnaire was administered as a *group-administered questionnaire* ensuring that all respondents received the same stimulus and completed their questionnaires without discussion with other respondents. The researcher initially explained the purpose and method of completing the questionnaire to all the respondents. Questions were then dealt with one by one and in similar manner, which warranted a similar stimulus from the explanation of questions.

The researcher trained the educator of the experimental group on emotional awareness and the middle childhood developmental phase as well as on the different modules and activities in the EA program. Educators are already equipped with basic knowledge and personal experience on the emotional and mental needs of children which serve as a solid foundation for the training regarding

emotional awareness. The educator thus needn't have any additional expertise in the field of emotional awareness. The training she received aimed to equip her (properly) towards the accurate implementation of the EA program in her class (experimental group). It was also important to improve her understanding of the emotional being of her learners and to enlighten her on the significance of the different constructs included in the EA program. The EA program was then implemented with a different topic for each week and different activities to develop and enhance that aspect.

After completion of the EA program, a post-test was conducted with both the experimental and comparison group. A follow-up test was conducted one month later (only with the experimental group) to determine whether their emotional awareness developed further or deteriorated a month after they were no longer exposed to the EA program. This one-month-follow-up measurement points to the consistency of knowledge obtained from the EA program.

Due to practical constraints in the school's program it wasn't possible to expose the comparison group to the EA program on completion of the study, as would be ethically accepted. The researcher's agreement with the school was hence that the school will receive the program to implement to all the learners in the school, which would thus include the learners who were part of the comparison group.

The collected data was processed and interpreted by the researcher using computerized data analysis to configure the collected data into comprehensible information by using SPC XL Software for Microsoft Excel program. Research results, namely the influence of the Emotional Awareness Program, developed by the researcher, on variables as measured in a pre- and post-test of the experimental and the comparison group was statistically analysed, and then presented through graphical presentations in graphs, diagrams and tables to bring order, structure and meaning to the collected data.

1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

During the course of this study, the following limitations were identified:

- The research results of the study cannot be generalized because the EA program was only presented once and thus only within this one sample of respondents. Even so, sound conclusions could be drawn from the study's results due to the fact that a significant number of respondents was included.

- Language constraints limited the boundaries of the study. Only Afrikaans-speaking respondents were included to ensure empirically sound practice by keeping the stimulus content in the questionnaire uniform. The primary school that was utilized in this study also had only one English class and three Afrikaans classes, which limited the options for utilization of English-speaking learners. However, the results obtained despite this fact are believed to be an accurate indication of the impact of the EA program, for language does not determine the presence or absence of emotional health.

- The EA program was developed to enhance emotional awareness through education on specific emotional content and the correct manner of reacting to it. A further facet of the EA program was to expand the respondents' vocabulary regarding emotions in order to increase their capabilities concerning emotional expression. The LEAS-C standardized questionnaire measured the levels of emotional awareness of the respondents but not their development regarding their vocal ability to express their emotional experiences. This limitation was overcome by utilizing the glossary of words supplied for the scoring of the LEAS-C to draw comparisons between the pre-, post- and follow-up test after one month in order to determine to what extent development of emotion vocabulary and emotional expression took place.

- Respondents who were absent for the pre-test or post-test had to be excluded from the study, which resulted in a lower number of useable questionnaires.

- The group-administered questionnaire has the disadvantage that the one or two respondents who did not take the process seriously distract the rest of the group resulting in a negative influence on other respondents' efforts. The researcher has experience in working with children, especially misbehaviour in this manner, and was therefore able to take control of such behaviour. The presence of their class educator also proved valuable in this regard.

1.7 DEFINITIONS OF MAIN CONCEPTS

1.7.1 Awareness

Awareness is a diverse term and different types of awareness can be identified. A general explanation of awareness is found in the Oxford Dictionary (2012) where it is defined as "the knowledge or perception of a situation or fact." Kirchner (2012) narrows it down to a definition of awareness within the context of Gestalt in her indication that "awareness is more than the pure thought of a problem but is integrative, implying wholeness, allowing for appropriate responses to a given situation in accordance with one's needs and the possibilities of the environment".

The researcher defines awareness, in the context of this study, as the ability to recognize, understand and handle a specific emotional experience or situation on the grounds of knowledge and experience about the effect and result the situation will have, as well as knowledge on fitting reactions to it.

1.7.2 Emotions

West and Turner (2011:217) define emotion as "the critical internal structure that orients us to and engages us with what matters in our lives, our feelings about ourselves and others".

Blocker-Adams (2010:20) defines emotion as "a mental and physiological state associated with a wide variety of feelings, thoughts and behaviours. It is a prime determinant of the sense of subjective well-being and appears to play a central role in many human activities".

Emotion is defined, in the context of this study, as a mostly unconscious mental state associated with feelings, thoughts and behaviours that usually occur spontaneously rather than through conscious effort. The occurrence of an emotional episode is often accompanied by physiological and psychological changes.

1.7.3   Emotional Awareness

According to Steiner (1997:27), emotional awareness is the enhancing of contact with feelings that results in the strengthening of relationships. Emotional awareness can be experienced on different levels, namely above and below verbal boundaries. The levels above verbal boundaries are an indication of an increase in verbal emotional communication, which in turn results in an increase in awareness of feelings. Levels below verbal boundaries indicate an inability to verbalize feelings, which in turn indicates an inability to own these feelings.

The functionality of emotional awareness is described by Ellis and Newton (2000:245) in their definition of emotional awareness as a motivational component for the planning and direction of instrumental behaviour, subjective feelings and moods. Lane in Carblis (2008:99) defines emotional awareness in terms of emotional intelligence as "the ability to use emotional information gained from emotional awareness in a constructive and adaptive manner".

Gross (2007:271) supplies a definition of the concept of emotional awareness in stating that "the awareness of an emotion helps people engage in voluntary controlled actions and may thus promote adaptive behaviour".

The researcher believes emotional awareness to be the enhancing of contact with one's feelings. Underdeveloped emotional awareness is evident in an inability to verbalize feelings and thus an inability to own these feelings. Emotional awareness provides the knowledge to discriminate between different emotions and utilize that information to direct thinking and actions. In the context of this study, emotional awareness determines the learner's level of functioning in the strengthening of relationships, as a result of the ability to be in contact with own emotions and to discriminate between different emotions and emotions of others.

1.7.4   The Middle Childhood Developmental Phase

Fass and Grossberg (2012:60) indicate that developmentalists, a diverse group that includes psychologists, anthropologists, sociologists, geneticists, neuroscientists, biologists and educators, define as the period from roughly age five to twelve. Cooper (2005:211) agrees with this

submission when he indicates that the span of the ages six to twelve years define the middle childhood developmental phase. Rathus (2013:268, 276, 308) defines to be a time for learning many new motor skills, enhancement of self-esteem and acceptance by peers. During this phase, children make enormous strides in their cognitive development and their thought process and language becomes more logical. The acquisition of cognitive and social skills is a major developmental task in the middle childhood developmental phase.

In the context of this study, the researcher defines the middle childhood developmental phase as the stage following the mastering of a vast amount of developmental abilities. Language, control over bodily functions, eating habits and cognitive abilities are all developed when reaching the middle childhood developmental phase. Although these abilities still need shaping, it is emotional development and especially the self-concept and the role and place the individual has in the system surrounding him/her that receives the most developmental concentration.

The middle childhood developmental phase presents in the primary school years, approximately between the ages of six and twelve years. The middle childhood developmental phase can further be divided into two sub-phases, as is the differentiation in primary education, namely junior primary and senior primary. Most of the development in this phase is done during the ages six to twelve years. A vast developmental and cognitive difference is evident between the capacity of learners in grade one to grade three where basic learning skills and cognitive abilities is required, and learners in grade four to grade seven where advanced cognitive skills as well as advanced emotional and social abilities are needed (Maritz, 2008).

In the context of this study the respondents are children in the middle childhood developmental phase, with specific referral to children in grade three, between the ages of eight and nine years.

1.7.5   Program

Program is defined by Barker (2003:66) in the Social Work Dictionary, as a plan or guideline about what is to be done.

Morris and Pinto (2007:117) defines a program as a collection of change actions (projects and operational activities) purposefully grouped together to realize strategic and/or tactical benefits.

The researcher defines program in the context of this study as guidelines for the expansion of knowledge on a specific subject, namely emotional awareness and directions for the application of that knowledge.

1.8 COMPOSITION OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

The research report is constructed and organised into the following nine chapters:

Chapter 1: General introduction, summary of research methodology and exposition of the study**.**

Chapter 2: The Gestalt perspective as the theoretical frame of reference for the study.

Chapter 3: Discussion of middle childhood as developmental phase.

Chapter 4: Neurological development of the child's brain and its influence on a child's emotional development and ability to learn.

Chapter 5: Emotional awareness as a concept and decisive component of development in the middle childhood developmental phase through elaboration on emotional awareness, its attributes and the value of optimal emotional awareness for the child in the middle childhood developmental phase.

Chapter 6: Utilization of the educating system as medium for the development and enhancement of the emotional awareness of the child in the middle childhood developmental phase.

Chapter 7: Emotional Awareness Program developed for education in emotional awareness.

Chapter 8: Discussion of the research methodology as utilized in the study.

Chapter 9: Empirical findings from the research of the study and analysis of data

Chapter 10: Summary, conclusions and recommendations arising from the study.

1.9 SUMMARY

This chapter outlined emotional awareness and its importance within the development of the child in the middle childhood developmental phase. The significance and consequence of educating children on emotional awareness within their school setting was evaluated. This discussion concluded with the role and function of implementing an emotional awareness program, developed from a Gestalt play therapeutic perspective, within the educational system and with defining the main concepts utilized in the study.

The following chapter will focus on the Gestalt perspective as the theoretical frame of reference for the study.

CHAPTER 2

Gestalt Approach as the Theoretical Framework for the Study

I do my thing and you do your thing.
I am not in this world to live up to your expectations, and you are not in this world to live up to mine.   You are you, and I am I, and if by chance we find each other, it's beautiful.
If not, it can't be helped. ~ Gestalt prayer of Fritz Perls

2.1   INTRODUCTION

Children in our modern day are faced with many expectations on academic, sport, cultural, emotional, social and physical developmental areas. Children need to be equipped for the challenges they will have to address in their attempt to reach adulthood as well as to become adjusted, assertive and emotionally balanced human beings. The role of emotional knowledge and the awareness of one's emotional needs, values and strengths is a subject which has long caught the attention of social scientists and educators alike, in studies regarding *emotional intelligence* and the development thereof (Blom, 2000; Goleman, 2012; Le Roux & De Klerk, 2004). These studies focus on the significance of being or becoming emotionally intelligent. The researcher is of the opinion that the way to optimal emotional intelligence is through a separation of the state of being "emotionally intelligent" into different building blocks inadmissible in achieving optimal emotional intelligence.

Geldard and Geldard (2002:67) refer to *awareness* as an essential facet of the therapeutic process in the Gestalt approach and *emotional awareness*, as conceptualized within the Gestalt approach, is identified by the researcher as one of the building blocks and a method of achieving optimal emotional intelligence.

For the purpose of this study emotional intelligence is thus acknowledged as the end result or outcome of thorough emotional awareness and awareness skills from a Gestalt perspective.

The rationale behind this study was to develop a program for the development and/or enhancement of the emotional awareness of children in their middle childhood developmental phase. The program was developed for utilization within the educational system as it is meant to not only have benefit for individual children but also the educational system as a whole. The current focus on emotional intelligence, emotional knowledge, as well as social and emotional learning is mostly available where children are exposed to specific courses, books on the topic or where parents take particular responsibility in educating their children in this manner. The researcher found in daily social work practice that a very small number of children do receive emotional education of any sort, although it seems that a vast amount of difficulties in their lives could often be drawn back to the child's inability to cope with situations due to inadequate emotional awareness. The researcher is of the opinion that optimal emotional awareness and knowledge will benefit children in their:

- concept of themselves;
- relationships with the people in their direct environment;
- reaction to difficulties and specific situations occurring in their day to day life; and
- adaptability to the world that surrounds them.

Inclusion of this totality of aspects that is required for positive emotional development necessitates the utilization of a theoretical approach, which can uphold this wholeness of being.

According to De Vos (2005:37),

> "the theoretical foundation of a scientific study needs to be universally and interdisciplinary acceptable with empirically tested or testable propositions. These propositions are woven into a network of integrated statements with a view to understanding, explaining and predicting the behaviour of a phenomenon or phenomena".

This study was conducted from a Gestalt approach and the following part of this chapter will discuss the Gestalt approach and its content in order to provide a broad perspective of its applicability for this study.

2.2 RATIONALE FOR THE GESTALT APPROACH AS THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

Friederich Salomon Perls, born in 1893 in a Jewish ghetto on the outskirts of Berlin, founded the Gestalt approach to therapy (fritzperls.com, 2012).

The word "Gestalt" has no adequate English equivalent. The word is just much richer and more complex, and thus impossible to translate. This is why the German word Gestalt is also used in other languages. Glatzeder, Goel and Von Müller (2010:50) draw this together in their indication that the most basic concept of Gestalt is of course "Gestalt" itself.

The Gestalt approach provides a theoretical foundation with a basis appropriately relevant to this study. Ginger (2007:3) designates Gestalt to be a natural universal approach for people of all ages, all levels, from diverse cultural backgrounds and in variety of situations. The Gestalt approach therefore seems to be best suited to be utilized as the theoretical framework for this study.

Wholeness and awareness are two important concepts of the Gestalt approach. Mann (2010:29) points to the awareness continuum to be related to every aspect of Gestalt. He states that the aim of Gestalt is "awareness" which is being in contact with one's existence and *what is* at this moment in time. Clarkson (2004:1) suggests that the definition of Gestalt connotes to the structural entity which is both different from and much more than the sum of its parts. Clarkson (2004:1) utilizes the idea of a family as a useful example to describe the concept of wholeness. She states that a family is made up of separate members, each with his or her individual psychology. One can analyse each of them without seeing the others, but the way in which the family operates as a systemic whole is uniquely more than, and different from, the sum total of the individual psychologies of the family members. This factor correlates with the viewpoint of the Gestalt approach if kept in mind that a person's wholeness is imperative within the Gestalt approach. The rationale for the implementation of an emotional awareness program from a Gestalt approach within the educational system is thus primarily the facets of *wholeness and awareness.* **Wholeness** because change in one component (emotion) could affect the child's entire configuration and produce a new meaning for the child (Thomas, 2005:351) and **awareness** because when

emphasizing raised awareness, Gestalt therapy enables the child to get in touch with their current experiences with regard to somatic or bodily sensations, emotional feelings and thoughts (Geldard & Geldard, 2002:67).

Children are faced with challenges, embedded within their day-to-day experiences in school. The experiences or situations which need to be faced within the school environment encompass a broad scope of mental, cognitive, social, emotional, psychological and physical components. The researcher identified a variety of different challenges they have to face, in the sense that:

- they are exposed to supportive as well as demanding relationships;
- they need to communicate efficiently with peers, peer leaders, younger learners, educators and parents of other learners;
- they need to grasp the concept of their abilities, strengths and weak points; and
- they are involved with authority figures (educators) whom they cherish as well as those they fear or despise and need to be able to cope with all of these relationships in a manner that delivers growth potential.

Children are thus on a daily basis involved in experiencing all kinds of emotional turmoil within their school and peer group environment. These experiences do not only remain emotional, they are also experienced physically (e.g. tummy aches or headaches due to anxiety), and affect their social skills and relationships (e.g. aggressiveness in an effort to disguise another emotion or uncertainty), self-esteem and cognitive abilities (Cohen, 2001:3; Jensen in Mortiboys, 2005:29; Prinsloo, Tileston, 2004:32; Vorster & Sibaya, 1996:34). Geldard and Geldard (2002:106) support these authors in this regard when they add that many children who experience emotional difficulties seem to have some impairment in their contact functioning, that is listening, touching, talking, moving, smelling, looking and tasting.

It is therefore imperative that the theoretical framework within which this study will be conducted supports the child as a holistic being and takes other influences in his environment into consideration.

The essence of the motivation behind the utilization of the Gestalt approach as theoretical framework for this study is best recapitulated in Clarkson's (2004:3) indication that "modern Gestalt aims for an integration of body, feelings and intellect, seeing the person's most basic needs within the context of the social environment". The Gestalt is thus a 'natural bridge' for the research methodology of this study.

This chapter will thus focus on the Gestalt approach's concepts, fundamental principles, goals and theoretical frame. This chapter furthermore aims to clarify the applicability of the Gestalt approach as frame of reference for this study. In closing, the chapter seeks to clarify how Gestalt play therapy is of importance in the context of this study being the method or tool that will be utilized in the program for development or enhancement of the emotional awareness of children in the middle childhood developmental phase. Full comprehension of the Gestalt approach would include an understanding of the concepts from which the approach derives its conclusions. These concepts also provide the terms, which will clarify the indication to certain matters throughout the study. These concepts will hence need to be discussed ahead of proceeding into discussions regarding emotional awareness and the developmental stage concerned in this study.

2.3   CONCEPTS OF THE GESTALT APPROACH

2.3.1   Introduction

Dubin, in De Vos (2005:28), emphasizes that "for those aspects of the world that constitutes the subject matter of a given scientific discipline, terms must be available". The main concepts embedded in the Gestalt approach and its relevance and applicability in the context of this study are hence important. In addition to the understanding of the concepts, it is also important to take the applicability of these concepts within the child's development into consideration.

The following section will subsequently focus on a discussion of the main concepts within the Gestalt approach. Where applicable, it will be discussed in relation to children, taking the purpose and aim of this study into consideration.

2.3.2   Gestalt

Although there are ways in which people are similar, Korb, Davenport and Korb [Sa] indicate that in the Gestalt approach each person is distinct and significantly different from all others, and perceives the world in unique ways. This unique perception is the aspect which provides the distinction between different people due to the significance of the combination of their mental, physical, emotional and spiritual experiences.

The cornerstone of the Gestalt approach, according to Clarkson (2004:2) is its emphasis on the wholeness of a person, and not just the intrapsychic or merely the interpersonal dimension. In this regard Blom (2004:10) postulates that gestalt or holism is an inseparable entity of the body, emotional and spiritual aspects, language, thought and behaviour.

Gazda, Ginter and Home (2001:128) elucidate this matter in their explanation that:

> When a need is met, the gestalt it organized becomes complete, and it no longer exerts an influence – the organism is free to form new gestalten. When this gestalt formation and destruction are blocked or rigidified at any stage, when needs are not recognized and expressed, the flexible harmony and flow of the incomplete gestalten, clamors for attention and, therefore, interfere with the formation of new gestalten.

Perls, in O'Leary and Knopek (1992:10), suggests that any aspect of a person's behaviour could be regarded as a manifestation of this gestalt or whole. In this way, what individuals do provides as much information as what they feel, think or say. The human being is thus a unit consisting of many parts, which functions interrelated to each other.

Gestalt intervention thus enables a person to become well adjusted and accommodating to oneself in the formation of a complete gestalt, contributing to development and psychological health, which is where the emphasis of this study lies.

Carroll and Oaklander (1997:184), (renowned Gestalt play therapists) validate that children are born as fully functioning, integrated organisms encompassing senses, body, emotions and intellect. As children develop according to their unique genetic blueprint, these processes become more differentiated and their individuality evolves. Blom (2004:10) echoes this viewpoint regarding

children in her indication that, from the Gestalt theory point of view, children can also be considered as holistic entities, which means that the sum total of their physical, emotional and spiritual aspects, language, thought and behaviour is more than its components. Their emotional experiences will thus also have an effect on the other components.

This study is concerned with the child's emotional development and is undertaken within the educational system as it is, according to the concept of gestalt/wholeness, necessary to take into regard that children are not only emotional beings, but holistic entities with many factors influencing their emotional functioning. Children's wholeness within the educational system are influenced by their school environment, relationships with peers and authority figures, their cognitive abilities, their achievements and failures as well as the psychological and physiological facets of their lives. The presence of these factors within the educational system will thus benefit the study of children's emotional awareness and development thereof within the concept of their wholeness/gestalt.

Blom (2004:10) indicates in this regard that the focus of Gestalt therapy with children will hence need to be on their physical, emotional and spiritual aspects, as well as language, thought and behaviour, in order to approach them as holistic individuals. This consequently needs to be taken into consideration in the development of a program for the enhancement of the emotional awareness of children, as is the aim of this study.

2.3.3   Figure and Ground

Figure and ground is an important concept of the Gestalt theory as it refers to the perception a person derives from his surroundings and is described by Korb et al. [Sa] as a perception of the individual`s environment as a total unit; he/she responds to the whole of what is seen. This whole is composed of the stimuli of which the person is aware of or to which he/she attends, the "*spontaneous concentration*" of contact (the figure) and those of which the person is not aware or does not attend to (the ground). The figure/ground process is perceptual and changes momentarily.

O'Leary & Knopek (1992:11) provided a constructive example for his indication that when a person's experiences are from a meaningful whole, healthy functioning exists. A smooth transition

results when certain happenings are in the focus of awareness, while others are in the background. O'Leary uses the example of being busy with writing while becoming aware of your car being parked in a no-parking zone after 9:00 am. It is 10:45 and as you continue writing, the need to move the car becomes more persistent, so that it becomes difficult to concentrate. You go and move the car.

This example demonstrates the figure / ground dichotomy of the Gestalt approach. While thoughts were expressed on paper it was the important object of awareness and thus the figure at that moment. The ground or background is the street where the car is parked. As awareness moved to the car, writing was no longer of primary importance as the car became the figure of attention. Moving the car psychologically freed you to return to your work. Healthy functioning requires this fluidity of process.

Blom (2004:13) states that children organise their sense, thoughts, cognition and behaviour around a specific need until it is satisfied. Once it is satisfied, the child is in a state of withdrawal, rest or balance until a new need appears and the cycle is repeated. If the child experiences more than one need simultaneously, the healthy organism will pay attention to the most dominant need. The healthy organism can identify the most dominant need on his or her foreground, in order to use resources within him or herself or the environment to satisfy these.

2.3.4 Awareness

Bronwell (2010:77) states that awareness in Gestalt consists of the first person perspective of self-conscious experience in which one "owns" his/her experience. The task of the therapist according to Mann (2010:227) relates to a wider awareness of the whole therapy situation rather than simply heightening the clients' awareness of certain problem areas. To *be aware* and to *pay attention* are acknowledged by Korb, Davenport and Korb [Sa] as habits that will enable clear communication and interaction with one's environment and with one's self in the "now" or present moment.

Increasing awareness is described by Gestalt authors like Woldt and Toman (2005:82) as being the heart of the Gestalt philosophy and methodology and is characterized by contact, sensing and Gestalt formation.

Mann (2010:29) indicate the aim of Gestalt to be awareness and describes it as "being in contact with one's existence and with *what is* at this moment in time". It is thus evident that the development of emotional awareness can have a significant influence on the total being of the child and may benefit the child on different levels, as is the intention with the planned study.

2.3.5 Self-regulation / Homeostasis

Perls in Reynolds and Woldt (2002:245) clarify that the process of homeostasis can be called a process of self-regulation. The process of maintaining balance, organismic self-regulation and homeostasis are accomplished in a cyclic manner. A person first becomes aware of a need that impacts the person's equilibrium, and then he/she moves to make contact within the self, environment or others in order to satisfy the need. The person returns to a state of balance or homeostasis when that need is met or another satisfactory alternative is discovered. To clearly grasp this concept and its applicability for the child client one needs to examine it from an "awareness" point of view.

The concept of homeostasis or process of organismic self-regulation entails that the child constantly experiences diverse needs, which can be of a physical, emotional, social, spiritual or intellectual nature. This causes discomfort, up to the point where the child becomes aware of or is lead to become aware of the reason for the discomfort. Action is then taken to satisfy this need, upon which homeostasis is restored. The process whereby this action and restoration takes place in order to satisfy needs and restore balance is termed organismic self-regulation (Blom, 2004:11).

2.3.6 Contact

Contact, according to Clarkson (2004:41), is equivalent to focusing clearly and vividly on the most important aspect of a personal situation without extraneous or background stimuli distorting the

fullness of attention or the quality of the interaction. Yontef and Jacobs in Blom (2004:19) elucidate this viewpoint in their indication that contact refers to "being in touch with what is emerging here and now, moment to moment". Blom (2004:19) further explains that "contact takes place as soon as the organism uses the environment to satisfy its needs".

Clarkson (2004:40) specifies that "the sensory motor functions (seeing, hearing, feeling, moving and touching) are potentially the functions through which contact is made". She elaborates that it is important to remember that just as the whole is more than merely the sum of its parts, contact is more than the sum of all the possible functions that may go into it. Clarkson thus indicates that seeing and hearing is no guarantee of good contact, it is rather *how* one sees or hears that determines the quality of contact.

Blom (2004:19) points out that in contact regarding children, in the Gestalt theory, both intrapersonal contact (contact between children and aspects of themselves) and interpersonal contact (contact between children and the environment) are important and notes that:

> Contact boundaries in this regard are also present and can be regarded as the point where children experiences the "I" in relation to that which is "not I" in other words that which is within (part of) and outside (foreign to) themselves. Through contact making and appropriate withdrawal, children's needs are met and they grow. When the child's boundary is rigid and not flexible, it obstructs change, which is then referred to as isolation.

Contact boundary disturbances are aspects that are very relevant in work with children for they frequently utilize it to prevent contact with therapists or contact with unfinished business in an effort to protect themselves from the discomfort that it brings along. These disturbances are thus further discussed, as it is also part of the concept *contact*.

2.3.6.1   Contact boundary disturbances

Turner (2011:260) suggests contact boundary disturbances to be the problems that occur at the point of "contact". Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2012:200) state that "individuals may have characteristic styles of interrupting or resisting contact and that repeated interrupting or resisting contact may result in psychopathology". Different contact boundary disturbances (ways

of resisting contact) are identified by different authors in Gestalt, five of which are acknowledged by most authors, i.e. *confluence, retroflection, introjections, projection and deflection.*

These contact boundary disturbances will hence be described from the viewpoint of Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2012), Lebow (2008), Turner (2011) and Nelson-Jones (2000), as well as its application in working with children, according to Blom (2004).

- *Confluence*

Lebow (2008:153) indicates confluence to be a weak or inadequate boundary between the self and the environment, thus over-identification with the environment. According to Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2012:201) when there is a merging of boundaries, there can be a feeling of not really knowing where one person stops and the other begins. Confluence can be associated with excessively over-accommodating behaviour among people who desperately want to be liked and approved by others. Turner (2011:261) adds to the description of confluence that it is also the denial of differences and a unrealistic focus on similarities.

Blom (2004:26) applies this boundary to children in explaining that confluence implies that children's own identity became lost, and that they do not have a sense of self that distinguishes them from their environment. A common example of confluence is a parent that has specific expectations of his or her child, which are not at all related to the child's need.

- *Retroflection*

Nelson-Jones (2000:159) describes retroflection as occurring when the individual fails to discriminate self and others by treating themselves the way they originally wanted to treat other people or objects. They redirect their activity inward and substitute themselves instead of the environment as the target of their behaviour. Lebow (2008:153) summarizes it to be "an impulse directed towards the environment that is turned against the self". Turner (2011:261) simplifies this boundary disturbance as the process during which individuals do to themselves as they would like to do to someone else or have someone else do to them. Children often retroflect emotions of grief and anger by means of symptoms such as headaches, stomach-aches, asthma attacks or hyperactivity (Blom, 2004:27).

- *Introjection*

Lebow (2008:153) explains introjection to be a term taken from psychoanalysis to describe unexamined taking in of ideas, beliefs and identity without awareness. Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2012:201) agree that it involves uncritical acceptance of the beliefs of others as standards. Turner (2011:261) elaborates on this boundary as "the inappropriate intake of information from others, e.g. internalization of parental messages with the result that the person is plagued by commands of "*I should", "I ought to*" or "*I have to"*.

Blom (2004:22, 23) states that introjection in children occurs when they take in contents from their environment without criticism and awareness; they thus sacrifice their own opinion and beliefs and accept the point of view of others without questioning it. Introjection can negatively influence children's self-awareness, for instance when they get the message that certain emotions are negative and may not be experienced or expressed, e.g. boys don't cry.

- *Projection*

According to Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2012:201) projection occurs when a person places (or projects) his/her emotions or traits onto others and Lebow (2008:153) points to projection as "not being able to own an experience". Turner (2011:261) describes the process of projection as "disavowing parts of oneself and projecting these parts unto others". This behaviour takes away power and gives the environment more control than warranted.

Blom (2004:24) observes that by means of projection, children deny their own personal experience and often tell lies and deny their emotions, because they have too little ego strength to take responsibility for their actions. They blame others for the unpleasant events in their lives and these emotions are projected, since it is too painful to possess them.

- *Deflection*

Sommers-Flanagan and Sommers-Flanagan (2012:201) describe deflection to be "a distraction designed to defuse or reduce contact; this can include avoiding physical contact, using humour excessively and talking about others instead of the self".

According to Blom (2004:28, 29) children use deflection as a handling strategy for painful experiences by outbursts of anger or other forms of reactionary behaviour, or by fantasising and daydreaming. Deflection manifests itself in children to protect them against emotional pain. The child may for instance change the subject or get up and move to another part of the playroom during therapy in order to avoid the issue at hand.

2.3.7   Topdog / Underdog

A well-known term identified by Perls is that of the so called 'topdog/underdog' concept. Clarkson (2004:107) explains the topdog/underdog concept in that the 'topdog' represents that part of the personality which comments and passes judgement on the person's ongoing life, behaviour and feelings, very often in a critical and dismissive way – sometimes in ways that are quite cruel, e.g. "who would want to be friends with you, you're so ugly". The underdog represents that part of the personality that is apparently the victim or the oppressed one. It is forever promising to do better next time, these promises tend to get broken very easily.

Korb et al. [Sa] elucidate the concept of 'topdog vs. underdog' as follows:

> A common way of manipulating the self to stay blocked from healthy contact with the environment. The topdog part of the personality is the demander of perfection, the manifestation of a set of introjected *should's* and *should not's*. "I should be on time, I should keep my room clean". The underdog is the manifestation of resistance to external demands. Essentially, the underdog agrees that the topdog's demands are appropriate; however, internal sabotage assures that these demands will never be met: "I'll never be on time, I will never be able to keep my room clean". In the topdog/underdog encounter, the underdog usually wins, triggering incipient depression or anxiety due to this feeling of incapacity.

Since we cannot lead a whole life without both of these aspects of ourselves, the Gestalt approach works towards an integration of the two, where neither will dominate but where a balance of both is effectively achieved.

2.3.8   Unfinished Business

Clarkson (2004:51) labels the idea of unfinished business as a core notion in the Gestalt approach to explain how energy becomes blocked or "interrupted". She indicates that when a person does not move easily and spontaneously around the awareness cycle to get their needs met, the event is unfinished.

Mann (2010:57) elucidates the concept of unfinished business as "being concerned with our need to complete the uncompleted". Lichner Ingram (2011:192) elaborates that when the Gestalt therapist formulates the problem in terms of unfinished business, the finishing of the business occurs through intense and full expression of emotion. Unfinished business thus also points to a person's unwillingness to experience the pain that they feel in order to move forward.

2.3.9   Present Centeredness

In an overview of Gestalt therapy on the website of the Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia [Sa], present-centeredness is regarded as a concept indicating that "living now is more central than dwelling in the past – or imagining a future divorced from the present". They further indicate that the Gestalt approach will start from the surface and then follow a person's experience – not seeking out the unconscious, but staying with what is present and aware.

Turner (2011:257) states that the Gestalt therapists do not dwell on the past although they recognize that past experiences have an effect on the present experiences of the client. The aim will thus be to focus on exercises to facilitate understanding of past experiences in context of the here and now. Mann (2010:15) elucidates that the focus in "here and now" is on immediate experiences and in doing so concentrating on *what* and *how* the situation is *now* perceived, rather than digging round in an attempt to discover *why* the situation might be perceived in a certain manner.

The following section will now focus on the fundamental principles which is underlying to the Gestalt approach.

2.4 FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES AS POINT OF DEPARTURE OF THE GESTALT APPROACH

2.4.1 Introduction

Perls (1976:16) said that "no individual is self-sufficient and can only exist in an environmental field. The nature between him and his environment determines the human being's behaviour".

Clarkson (2004:5) corroborates this conviction in her indication that the Gestalt approach is therefore concerned with "defining the nature of human lives in terms of meaningful wholes, whether these are biological or spiritual". Most of Gestalt practice (derived from Gestalt theory), is based on an exploration of:

· how such human needs arise,

· how they are frustrated, and

· how they are satisfied.

The Gestalt Therapy Institute of Philadelphia [sa] indicates the Gestalt approach to be a complete, complex and highly developed approach to human psychological functioning. Both Gestalt theory and practice are based on several profound areas of thought and study, and includes field theory, philosophy, psychoanalysis and psychology.

2.4.2 Gestalt as Phenomenological-Existential Approach

Yontef [sa] summarizes the Gestalt approach, which is the basis of Gestalt therapy, as:

> "a phenomenological-existential therapy which teaches therapists and patients a phenomenological method of awareness, in which feeling, perceiving, and acting are distinguished from interpreting and reshuffling pre-existing attitudes. Explanations and interpretations are considered to be less reliable than what is directly perceived and felt".

Clarkson (2004:4) points out that Perls saw Gestalt as the "only psychotherapy based purely on phenomenology – a psychological approach based on a philosophy, which works away from concepts and towards pure awareness". Blom (2004:2) validates this with her description of the Gestalt approach as "a humanist and process-oriented form of therapy as well as an existential approach, due to the emphasis on awareness of the present and immediate experience".

Geldard and Geldard (2002:35, 67) simplify the viewpoints of these authors in their indication that the Gestalt approach is based on the idea that individuals should accept responsibility and find their own way through life. They indicate a significant factor in Gestalt to be the *here and now* experience, any blockages or *unfinished business* which are experienced should be worked through in an attempt to be completely aware of current bodily sensations, emotional feelings and related thoughts (the whole). This is to be mastered rather than blaming the past or others for the current state that is being experienced. Inadequate mastering of the ability to identify here and now experiences and to work through unfinished business thus results in being troubled by these issues which leads to an inability to function optimally in an emotionally healthy manner.

Henderson and Thompson (2011:226) summarize Perls' conclusion of troubled people to be "people that cause themselves additional problems by not handling their lives appropriately" in the following six categories:

- *Lacking contact with the environment***:** Becoming so rigid that they cut themselves off from others or from resources in the environment.

- *Confluence:* Incorporation of too much of self into others or incorporation of too much of the environment into themselves that they lose touch with where they are. The environment then takes control.

- *Unfinished business:* Unfulfilled needs, unexpressed feelings, unfinished situations.

- *Fragmentation:* The effort to try to deny or discover a need, e.g. through aggression. A person's inability to find what he/she needs might be the result of fragmentation of the person's life.

- ***Topdog/underdog:*** The experience of a split in a person's personality namely what a person thinks he/she should do (topdog) and what he/she wants to do (underdog).

- ***Polarities (dichotomies):*** Floundering between existing natural dichotomies in life, such as body-mind, infantile-mature, spontaneous-deliberate, love-aggression, and unconscious-conscious. Much of everyday living seems to be involved in resolving conflicts posed by these competing polarities.

2.4.3   Awareness

Geldard and Geldard (2002:35, 67) explain that the client in Gestalt therapy is directed, through awareness, to get in touch with and to release strong emotions and to ultimately achieve a feeling of being more integrated. The central goal of Gestalt therapy, according to Perls in Thompson and Rudolph (2000:163) is deeper awareness, which promotes a sense of living fully in the here and now. His measure of success in Gestalt therapy was the extent to which clients grow in awareness, take responsibility for their actions and move from environmental support to self-support. Thomson and Rudolph (2000:164, 165) confirm that with full awareness, a state of organismic self-regulation develops and the total person takes control. This is done when the person focuses on one need (the figure) at a time and relegates other needs to the background. When the need is met, the gestalt is closed or completed and a new need come into focus and becomes the figure.

Yontef [sa] adds that:

> "clients and therapists in Gestalt therapy dialogue with each other or communicate their phenomenological perspectives. Differences in perspectives become the focus of experimentation and continued dialogue. The goal is for clients to become aware of what they are doing, how they are doing it and how they can change themselves, and at the same time learn to accept and value themselves. The emphasis in this regard is on what is being done, thought and felt at that moment, rather than on what was, might be, could be, or should be. Gestalt therapy focuses more on the process of what is happening than the content of what is being discussed".

2.4.4   Structure of the Personality

Perls (1973:136) devised five layers to depict how people fragment their lives and prevent themselves from succeeding and maturing. The five layers form a series of counselling stages and can be considered as five steps to a better Gestalt way of life; also compare Thompson, Rudolph and Henderson (2004:186), Thompson and Rudolph (2000:166, 167), as well as Blom (2004:35-40).

Layer 1 - The phony layer: When a person is trapped in trying to be what he is not. This layer is characterized by many conflicts that are never resolved.

Layer 2 - The phobic layer: When the person becomes aware of his phony games, he becomes aware of his fears that maintain the games. This experience is often frightening.

Layer 3 - The impasse layer: The layer a person reaches when he sheds the environmental support of his games and finds he does not know a better way to cope with his fears and dislikes. People often become stuck here and refuse to move on.

Layer 4 - The implosive layer: When a person becomes aware of how he limits himself, and begins to experiment with new behaviours within the counselling setting.

Layer 5 - The explosive layer: If experiments with new behaviours are successful outside the counselling setting, a person reaches the explosive layer, where he finds much unused energy that had been tied up in maintaining a phony existence. Figure 2.1 displays these layers in a graphical manner.
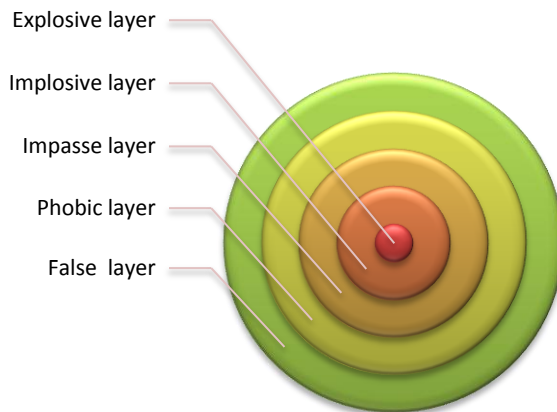
Figure 2.1: Structure of the personality (Blom, 2004:39)

Thompson and Rudolph (2000:167) conclude that the Gestalt approach is not concerned with symptoms and analysis but rather with total existence and integration. Gestalt thus rather focuses on the healing and future mental health than getting stuck in the rationale and grounds for the problem.

It is hence relevant to focus on the goals the Gestalt approach set out to achieve.

2.5   GOALS OF THE GESTALT APPROACH

The viewpoint of different authors varies regarding the main goal of the Gestalt approach. The researcher summarizes the goals of Gestalt as it is highlighted by the authors incorporated in the previous discussion on Gestalt. In light of this study being concerned with children in their middle childhood developmental phase, goals which entail this end are considered the Gestalt goals regarding this study.

According to Corey (2012:290) the basic goal of Gestalt therapy is awareness, which by and of itself is seen as curative or growth producing. Blom (2004:3) considers the Gestalt approach as a form of psychotherapy that focuses or promotes awareness on that which is immediately present. The aim of this goal in the Gestalt approach is thus to help the child client to improve the perceptions of his or her experiences in their totality.

Perls (founder of Gestalt) in O'Leary and Knopek (1992:18) describes the principal objective of the Gestalt approach as "an eliciting personal responsibility for achieving *self-regulation*". He states that the aim of Gestalt therapy is "to enable individuals to be aware of their own potential for independence". This is significant in working with children for they can do many more things than they believe they could. They need not lead their lives according to the expectation of others, nor directly regulate themselves.

Korb et al. [Sa] point towards *maturation* as a goal of the Gestalt approach. They explicate this as "the movement from *ill-health* (child-like dependence upon, or neurotic manipulation of, the environment for necessary support) towards *health* (self-support independent of, and interactive with the environment), in healthy ways with awareness of distinctions and boundaries".

Bronwell (2010:90) is of the opinion that the goal of the Gestalt approach is practical in healing and growth. The concerns in Gestalt is not to find out whether there is truth in the story being told but to understand the meaning given to the people and events in the story as it was experienced.

In conclusion Blom (2006:215) states that to her the goal of Gestalt is "to help children to become aware of their process, which is what they do, how they do it and how they satisfy their needs". Heightened awareness is created when children are able to identify who they are, what they feel, what they like and dislike, their choices and how their needs are met.

2.6   SUMMARY

The Gestalt approach can be summarized as a phenomenological-existential approach, which educates a phenomenological method of awareness. It indicates that sensation and performance must be determined from interpreting and reorganizing pre-existing mind-sets. The reasoning behind this is that the interpretation of something is not as reliable as that which is directly felt and perceived (Gestalt Therapy, 2004).

Thomas (2005:347) indicates that when the Gestalt approach is applied to child development, it perceives the child as a whole integrated organism. In this regard Thomas (2005:347) postulates that:

> To the holistic or field theorist, a new stimulus or experience does not simply add a new element to a child's store of actions or knowledge, leaving the previous elements undisturbed. Instead, every new experience can alter the relationship of many or all of the existing elements that have made up the personality to this point, so the patterning of the child's entire individuality is influenced.

The Gestalt approach is thus considered the most appropriate theoretical foundation for this study as it involves the child as a whole and complex being and takes into consideration how children's development regarding awareness and contact (with self, others and environment) influences their whole performance. The Gestalt approach furthermore focuses on children's senses, bodily awareness and emotional awareness. The inclusion of these factors is crucial to a program for the enhancement of emotional awareness and emotional abilities.

Children in their middle childhood developmental phase are especially involved in situations where multiple aspects have an influence on their actions and behaviour. This study derives its purpose and aim from the viewpoint that a child is composed from a complexity of mental, physical, social, spiritual and emotional factors, and that all of these factors need to be taken into consideration from the viewpoint of a scientific approach which supports this notion. It is therefore the reason why the researcher is conducting this study from a Gestalt approach to child development and intervention.

The following chapter will focus on the middle childhood developmental phase as developmental phase in the development of a human being. The focus will be on the characteristics of the middle childhood developmental phase as well as the specific needs of the child in this developmental phase, in relation to this study.