

# Challenges faced by the School Management Team (SMT) regarding school safety

by

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## DECLARATION

STUDENT NUMBER: 24493245

I declare that: Challenges faced by School Management Teams (SMTs) in terms of school safety issues is my own work.

I also declare that all sources used in this dissertation are acknowledged and this dissertation has not been submitted by me for a degree at another university.

Signature

Date

.....

.....

## **DEDICATION**

This study is dedicated to my parents GALIONI and MATODZI, my children, and all those who supported me from The Bride of Christ Fellowship Church.

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I wish to express my gratitude to the many people who assisted me during the course of my studies:

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## **ABSTRACT**

This research study seeks to examine the challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of school safety at schools in the Motetema Circuit. The problem is the disruption of lessons and the number of cases reported to the nearest police station from schools in the Motetema Circuit. Learners and educators tend to be concerned about their safety instead of concentrating on learning and teaching.

Local and international articles and other sources were used in the literature review to form the basis of my study. Most of the literature studied reveals that if learners and educators do not feel safe, learning and teaching will not be effective. Learning should be conducted in a safe environment. Well-disciplined schools should be established and programmes should be developed to address school safety.

Three schools were sampled in the Motetema Circuit, Greater Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province in South Africa. Data was collected through interviews, observations and document analysis. At each school SMT members were engaged in focus group interviews for a period of one and half hours. Categories and themes were used to analyse the data collected.

In consideration of all the challenges associated with school safety, School Management Teams need to have sufficient knowledge, skills and resources to promote safety at school.

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## List of Acronyms

OBE	Outcomes-based education
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
RCL	Representative Council of Learners
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SADTU	South African Democratic Teachers' Union
SGB	School Governing Body
SMT	School Management Team

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# Chapter 1 Background to the study

## 1.1 Introduction

The emergence of democracy in South Africa in 1994 brought about many changes and challenges, particularly in the Department of Education. A complete overhaul of the old system ushered in a new era in schools, including aspects of school safety. Challenges remain in the implementation of school safety policies and the necessary support that goes with it, especially at secondary school level. Part of the challenge calls for School Management Teams to play a supportive role in ensuring that educators implement safety procedures and policies in an effective manner. This research study therefore sought to examine the experiences of School Management Teams in terms of safety issues at school. Effective implementation of school safety measures warrants a thorough understanding and knowledge of related policies by those who are required to implement such measures, namely the School Management Team.

South Africa is a developing country that is changing more rapidly than most countries. All hindrances in the education system should be dealt with, particularly safety issues. If learners do not feel safe at school, they will not concentrate on teaching and learning.

The depth and breadth of the impact of crime and violence affects every community. In particular, the safety of schools and the prevention of violence are enormous challenges facing schools and communities. School communities pay a considerable price. Crime creates unnecessary expenses related to the maintenance of infrastructure, human resources and the loss of opportunities (Vienings & Palmary, 2002, p. 1). Education is threatened through the loss of learning and teaching time, a negative impact on the resilience of educators and learners, and damage to property. The “Safe Schools” initiative of the Department of Education (Department of Education, 2002) aims to free school communities from fear and the risk of victimisation, and to promote the realisation of the potential of all our youth. The South African Police Services (SAPS) has formed a partnership with the Department of Education to provide leadership in crime and violence reduction and prevention in schools. A basic principle in this research study is that every member of the community has a role to play in ensuring that schools are safe places for learning. It is only

when we are mobilised as a community, with a common understanding of the importance of all these roles, that we will achieve the essential objective of a safe and secure school environment, according to Vienings and Palmary (2002, p. 1)

Safety measures in schools, like any other policy, require that School Management Teams should manage the implementation process. The success of safety measures at schools depends on many things and one of the most important factors is the quality of management in the school. School management teams must also offer support to educators in dealing with safety issues at school. Kramer (1999, p. 155) maintains that a managed process is one that starts with a set of considered objectives or desired outcomes. School management teams thus need to create proper plans to achieve the desired outcomes or set objectives. This study attempts to assist School Management Teams in designing a school intervention programme to deal with safety issues at school, by providing information and making recommendations on taking a pro-active role.

Schools also need to build partnerships with community structures and government departments so that the schools can become leverage points for a safer community. School management teams should therefore try to work hand-in-hand with the following structures:

- School governing bodies
- Educators
- Learners
- Parents and families
- Health and social services providers
- Formal and informal community structures and groups such as religious communities, school safety forums, community police forums, transport suppliers, youth clubs, sports clubs and adult learning groups (Vienings & Palmary, 2003, p. 3).

This research study can act as a resource and enhance the culture of teaching and learning to make sure that every learner is fulfilling his/her right to learn at school without fear of victimisation.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

The purpose of my study is to explore the challenges faced by School Management Teams in implementing safety policies in schools. School safety has always been perceived as being essential for the proper functioning of public schools. There is a universal expectation that safety is necessary for students to learn and educators are expected to establish and maintain well-disciplined schools. Kennedy (2004, p. 61) claims that if students and staff do not feel safe, learning and teaching will not be effective. When learners do not feel safe, their concentration is affected and learner-educator contact time is wasted. Learning should be conducted in a safe and orderly environment. However, in many schools in South Africa, there are incidents of serious problematic behaviour related to safety (Colvin 2007, p. xv). In some instances, learners and educators are often terrified to attend school. When they are at school, they are scared to go to bathrooms alone or move around the school grounds. Some of them are fearful that they may be seriously injured or even killed by other learners and/or educators, who come to school armed (De Wet, 2002, p. 4).

Provisions should be made by School Management Teams to develop programmes to address school safety. School officials and educators need to respond to ongoing concerns regarding school safety. Safety in schools works toward creating a supportive environment for personal, social, and academic growth of students and staff. There is an assumption that if students are reasonably well behaved and school safety is assured, then educators will have the chance to optimise their teaching (Colvin, 2007, p. 101).

## 1.3 Research Questions

This study addresses the following research questions and sub-questions:

*Main research question:*

What are the challenges faced by School Management Teams (SMTs) in terms of school safety issues in the Motetema Circuit?

*Sub-questions:*

1. How do schools draft (plan), organise, lead, and control safety policies?
2. How do School Management Teams implement school safety policies?

3. What are the common factors that lead to safety being compromised?
4. How do schools deal with carrying weapons to school?
5. How do schools deal with bullying?
6. What is the role of the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety?
7. Do schools have rules for dealing with crisis issues such as shootings, stabbings, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunch time duties?
8. How do schools monitor the safety of learners in the school?
9. How do schools monitor the safety of learners in the school during strikes by educators?

## **1.4 The Importance of this Research Study**

I developed an interest in the topic of school safety since starting work as a principal in the Motetema Circuit five years ago. I noticed that criminal cases, originating from schools, were frequently reported to the nearest police station.

Shootings and stabbings affect and disrupt some of the schools around the area. I decided to investigate the possible reasons for these incidents and how school safety policies can be implemented effectively. The findings from this research study could be useful to:

- Various schools in the Motetema Circuit with an interest in improving learners' safety at their schools
- Regional, provincial and national school safety policy makers.

There is a gap or 'silence' in the literature I have studied in terms of school safety policy implementation in South Africa. The most problematic period is during break time when educators have their lunch. As a parent I am also concerned about the safety of my own children.

As Louis (2005, p. 78) suggests, without good discipline practices and the safety of schools being compromised, curriculum innovation, higher standards, and good teaching may not be possible. Safety must be the mainstay and starting point for high calibre schools. Students need to know why they should not bring weapons to school. They should be given balanced information about the risks they take if they carry a weapon. If facts are presented to learners in a straightforward and honest fashion, educators have a better chance of

influencing their behaviour. Louis (2005) points out that according to an informal survey conducted with more than 100 school administrators, approximately half the drug sales and half the acts of violence that occurred on school campuses were initiated by visitors to the schools. For schools to be safe, visitor screening procedures should be established, such as all visitors being required to report to the office. Assistance should be requested from local law enforcement agents, and patrol cars can be parked in front of schools (Louis, 2005, p. 78). Student leaders should be actively involved in monitoring visitors.

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996a), stipulates that the state is responsible for protecting every person in South Africa. This right is enshrined in Chapter 2 of the Bill of Rights. The executive responsibility of the state in this regard is performed by the South African Police Service (SAPS). In recent years there has been an extremely worrying trend of delinquent behaviour displayed by youths in general, and school children in particular. For example, The Star (14 March 2008, p. 14) reported that a 14-year old pupil killed a 19-year old pupil. The year 2008 saw a proliferation of horror stories concerning school safety issues, including gun and knife fights, which have become common in many schools. The Star further reports that grade 8 learners are in possession of firearms at schools.

Section 16 of The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) prescribes that:

1. The governance of every public school is vested in its School Governing Body.
2. A governing body stands in a position of trust towards the school.
3. Subject to this Act and any applicable law, the professional management of public schools must be undertaken by the principal under the authority of the Head of the Department of Education.

The Schools Act implies that not only the SAPS, but also the School Governing Body (SGB), which includes parents, educators, non-teaching staff, learners, professional management teams (those who manage schools on a daily basis such as principals, deputy principals and various educators), other government institutions, the organisations and structures of civil society, and individual citizens are all responsible for the safety of learners in South Africa.

A question posed to the former Minister of Education, Ms Naledi Pandor, in the National Assembly by Mr G Boinamo on 5 July 2005, is central to the concern of what is being done to address school safety. Mr Boinamo asked the following:

“In the light of continuous attacks on educators and learners on school premises and the theft of school facilities, is the Department of Education putting any mechanism in place to ensure safety in schools: if so, what are the relevant details?”

The Minister, Ms Naledi Pandor, responded as follows in 2005:

*The Department of Education is very concerned at the continuing incidents of violence and theft in schools and continues to strengthen its policies and programmes towards the creation of safe and secure environments for both learners and educators. Our approach has been primarily two-fold: the development of policies and programmes that go into all schools in the system, and more targeted approaches towards districts and schools identified as “hotspots” in relation to criminal and violent behaviour. In 2001, the Department gazetted the Regulation for Safety Measures at Public Schools, to regulate access into schools and also to prohibit the carrying of dangerous weapons in schools. To strengthen this regulation we also worked very closely with the Ministry of Safety and Security in implementing the Firearms Control Act and declaring schools firearm-free zones. This has assisted in some measure to curb unregulated traffic into schools. To help schools prevent incidents of violence and crime, intervene where necessary, or provide support to those learners and educators who have been affected by crime, we collaborated with the SAPS and jointly developed a resource manual, entitled “Signposts for Safe Schools.” This is a comprehensive manual that takes the school community through the basics of how to ensure safety in schools, from erecting a fence around the school to identifying and supporting children who are abusing alcohol and drugs, or who are themselves being abused. This booklet serves as permanent resource to schools and allows them to start those programmes that they consider a priority. The workbook has been distributed to all schools and a number of education officials and police managers in various districts have been trained on how to use*



*it. This workbook has been a useful resource to school Safety Committees, many of whom have members of the SAPS as permanent.*

The collaboration between the Departments of Education, and Safety and Security has sought to foster an important relationship between schools and the police services, which sees the police as critical friends of the school. Through the programmes “Adopt-a-cop” and “Captain Crime Stop”, police officers have started working directly with learners in schools.

The Education Laws Amendment Bill (Republic of South Africa, 2009), which is currently being tabled before parliament, indicates the seriousness with which the government is dealing with the matter. This legislation gives the government significantly enhanced powers to schools to deal with cases of serious misconduct, including the immediate suspension of a learner in order to ensure the safety of teachers and other learners (Steyn & Naicker, 2007, pp. 1-3).

Mhlongo and Attwood (2008, p. 2) report that teachers and parents are concerned that the government is not making safety at schools a priority. Their concern came after Finance Minister Trevor Manuel’s budget speech did not specify details of the government’s plan to fight crime at schools. This came at a time when teachers, parents and pupils had been pleading with the government to help make schools safe. Unions and parent organisations believe that the government is ignoring a problem that is affecting the entire country. According to Mhlongo and Attwood (2008, p. 2) our schools are facing a crisis which should be dealt with as a national priority.

Serrao and Bateman (2008, p. 1) suggest that schools are becoming the most common scenes of crime in South Africa. According to a report on school-based violence released by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC), crime is spreading rapidly in schools and is having a disruptive effect on education. The SA Institute of Race Relations recently reported that only 23% of pupils felt safe at schools (Serrao & Bateman 2008, p. 1). The SAHRC was quick to point out that while the Department of Education needed to do more to curb acts of violence in schools, communities also have a responsibility. Communities must contribute towards enhancing safety in their schools, by patrolling schools and ensuring the safety of their learners.

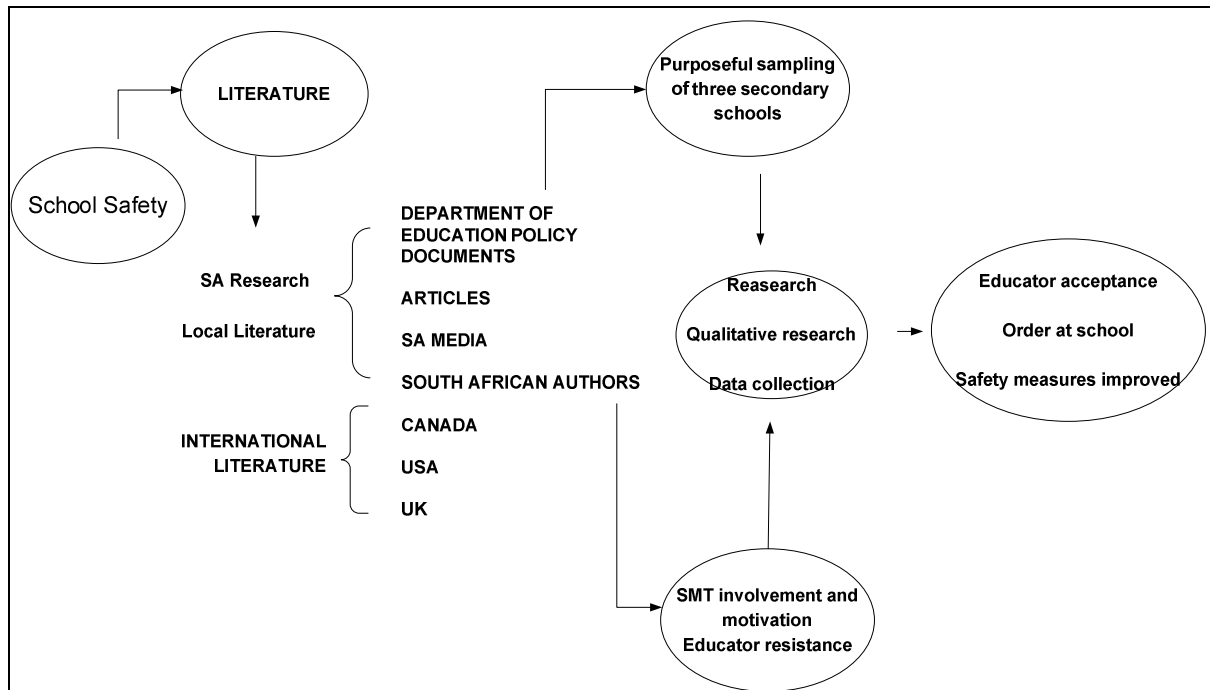
My research aims to stimulate academic investigation into school safety challenges. Research, particularly qualitative research, encourages the emergence of unexpected or unanticipated findings on particular topics. Therefore, various solutions can be explored in the context of South African schools, which can be refined and systematically implemented.

In addition, my research aims to establish the relationship between school safety and the culture of teaching and learning. As the literature suggests, it is essential that schools provide a safe environment for learning and development to take place. Violence contaminates the school environment and jeopardises the education process. It also infringes on learners' right to education, freedom and security of the person, and for them to be free from all forms of violence. The safety of learners is a matter of serious concern, and it is important to understand their perceptions of school safety in order to develop effective strategies to prevent or reduce school violence and improve learners' safety (Naser, 2005, pp. 64-65).

## **1.5 Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework helps to expand on, refine and develop a new theoretical understanding of safety problems in schools. The conceptual framework presented in Figure 1.1 brings together different approaches and perspectives.

**Figure 1.1: Conceptual framework**



### School safety

School safety is the central concept in this study. The literature study is based on South African research, local literature and international literature. The local literature consists of Department of Education policy documents, articles, SA media, and work by South African authors. International literature includes material from Canada, the USA and the UK. Three secondary schools were sampled through purposeful sampling. Qualitative research methods were used to collect data. The study investigates challenges faced by School Management Teams (SMTs) in terms of school safety issues. Once educators have accepted the recommendations of this study, order will be established in schools and safety measures will improve.

The South African Schools Act, The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, safety policies in schools, school governance, and disruptions in teaching and learning are also central concepts in this study. The SMT is the executive body of the school. It is their responsibility to ensure that safety policies are well implemented in schools, that the activities of learners are observed, and that all learners are safe. It is also the responsibility of the School Governing Body (SGB), through prudent governance, to make sure that

learners are kept safe. It is a human rights violation if learners are not safe in schools. Section 8(1) of the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) states that a governing body of a public school must adopt a code of conduct for learners after consultation with the learners, parents and educators of the school. A code of conduct (referred to in subsection (1) of the Act) must be aimed at establishing a disciplined and purposeful school environment, dedicated to the improvement and maintenance of the quality of the learning process.

## **1.6 Theoretical Framework**

This research is informed by implementation theory which pays particular attention to the attempts of policy makers to reach their objectives (Dunsere, 1978). Two models of policy implementation can be identified. The first one is the ‘top-down’ tradition. This bureaucratic process model starts with the policy managers at the top of the governance structure, and sees implementation as occurring in a chain (Dunsere, 1978) – a question of downward logistics which can be regarded from above. The approach to federal bureaucratic policies, such as in India and Pakistan, fits within this paradigm. Planning, organising, leading and controlling should be part of policy implementation.

The second model which I believe is applicable to my research is the model which views policy implementation as a process of mediation between competing interests, which can have unexpected outcomes (Dunsere, 1978). South Africa is a democratic state with democratic values, which encourages open debate. Therefore, I believe that implementation should be conducted in a collegial, democratic manner. This implementation theory is known as the ‘bottom-up’ model (Dunsere, 1978).

The Domino Theory is also applicable to this study. Vincoli (1994, p. 16) states that Heinrich’s Domino Theory defines four reasons why people commit unsafe acts: “improper attitude, lack of knowledge or skill, physical unsuitability, and improper mechanical or physical environment”. Inadequate supervision, which he also mentions, leads to safety problems. Vincoli (1994, p. 16) says that “lack of control by management begins the process that eventually results in incidents”. He stresses that if management do their job, which he defines as “planning, organizing, leading and controlling”, they can prevent incidents from happening at all.

## 1.7 Research Design

The research study was conducted in the Motetema Circuit, Greater Sekhukhune, in the Limpopo Province, South Africa. Three secondary schools were sampled by means of purposeful sampling. Data was collected through observation, document analysis and questionnaires. Focus groups were established and observations were conducted in natural field settings. In the case of participant observation, the researcher does not collect data to answer a specific hypothesis; rather the explanations are inductively derived from the field notes. The role of the researcher in this study was that of participant observer.

Observation is more than being a passive spectator; it entails actively seeking out answers to questions. Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2002, p. 138) note that there are two pitfalls that participant observers should avoid: getting too close to the participants (closing perspectives) and staying too distant from the participants (losing empathy). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 10): “participant observation is an interactive technique of participating to some degree in naturally occurring situations over an extended time and writing extensive field notes to describe what occurs”.

Data analysis is an ongoing cyclical process integrated into all phases of qualitative research (MacMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 10). Information was collected from teachers and learners about safety measures at the schools under study. Heads of department provided information about cases recorded in terms of safety at schools. Documents analysed were punishment books and school safety policies.

I adopted a qualitative research approach. Interviews were conducted with the School Management Teams, educators and learners. Different safety policies of the various School Management Teams were studied and interpreted. All information gathered was transcribed. Data was scanned and cleaned, which means that unnecessary information was excluded. A margin was left at the end of the transcription for coding and notes.

Data collection is one of the most important aspects of my study. I needed to ‘walk the way’ with my participants until they trusted me enough to tell and reveal their stories (Clandinin, 2003). People tend not to disclose, and are reluctant to share what they really think. I had to make sure that they felt comfortable with me. It was vital that they should not view me as a

threat or an outsider of whom they needed to be wary. This tendency shifts over time and as the relationship between the narrator and the listener deepens, the intensity changes and the real story starts to surface (Clandinin, 2003). The first few stories served to test the ground waters, to find out how safe it is to share.

Human beings narrate stories in order to remember, instil cultural knowledge, grapple with a problem, rethink the status quo, soothe, emphasise, inspire, speculate, justify a position, dispute, tattle, evaluate their own and others' identities, shame, tease, or entertain, amongst other purposes (Clandinin, 2003). Furthermore, the ends are not necessarily secured at the onset of the narration, but rather emerge over the course of a narrative unfolding (Lubbe, 2003, p. 27).

My data generating strategies were therefore aimed at ensuring and enhancing the emergence of multi-layered experiences. One of my priorities was to establish a working relationship with participants for the purpose of understanding the topic under study. My relationship with the participants helped me to create field texts which were the product of my field experiences. In my understanding, such texts are unique and unpredictable, in that they are determined by the researcher and participants. I strived to create a relationship of trust and confidence with my participants. This resulted in the sharing of more in-depth accounts of different experiences. I used a situational approach to collect this kind of data. It can be termed 'situational' because circumstances at schools are always unpredictable (Clandinin, 2003). My focus was on the School Management Team.

### **Participant observation**

A participant observation grid (adapted from MacMillan, 2001, p. 440) was used as a guide in collecting data. The grid was used repeatedly, in different situations. Observation included checking fire extinguishers, observing corridors, toilets and obscured locations behind buildings, ghost classrooms, and the movement of learners during break time and during the change of periods. I further observed gate control, car parks, any movement of strangers, and any broken windows. Finally, I observed the management of extra mural activities to establish whether learners are continually monitored and supervised, since they are not expected to be on their own at any time during the school day.

## **Unstructured interviews**

Unstructured, interactive interviews were conducted since they offer the participant an opportunity to tell his or her own story with minimal interruption (Morse & Richards, 2002, pp. 91, 93). Unstructured interviews are most appropriate when used in studies where the researcher seeks to learn primarily from participants about what matters (Morse & Richards, 2002, pp. 91, 93). The role of the researcher is to listen and let the participant tell his or her own story. I can ask questions on aspects that are not clear, preferably during the interview. Unplanned, unanticipated questions can be used, as well as probing for clarification (Morse & Richards, 2002, pp. 91, 93).

## **Informal conversations**

I also used informal conversation as a data generating strategy to enhance the development of the relationship between myself and the participants. I associated myself informally with various groups in the schools. This helped me to obtain a deeper understanding of the situation and become more aware of participants' experiences. An informal atmosphere might bring new information to the fore (Morse & Richards, 2002, p. 95). It is one of the more flexible data collection methods.

## **Document analysis**

I have already indicated that document analysis was employed as one of the data collection techniques. From the range of documents that are available, for example school policies, I had to decide which are relevant to my research questions. I gathered data from different angles before referencing it, then cleaning it. I also kept a reflective journal, in which I recorded events and reflections.

## **1.8 Ethical Considerations**

I wrote a letter to the circuit manager and asked for permission to visit schools. I obtained the informed consent and co-operation of the subjects under study. The respondents could have been wary of me or reluctant to co-operate. Therefore, aside from being an ethical imperative, written permission was necessary. The consequences of the research were made clear to the participants.

Confidentiality was given the highest priority. All measures were taken to ensure that the identity of participants is not revealed. No names are indicated anywhere. The interviews were conducted in a non-threatening environment and any harmful effects to the participants were avoided at all costs. At the end of the research study, I thanked the participants, which meant that I did not just 'disappear'. Refreshments were also served as a means of accommodating the participants. As I have already indicated, everything was done with due permission and with every attempt to allay any concerns of the participants.

## **1.9 Limitations and delimitations**

### **1.9.1 Limitations**

In any study, there may be some constraints beyond the control of the researcher, which may influence the research process (Murray & Laurence, 2000, p. 48). Since my research design is qualitative, and made use of interviews, a limitation is that some respondents may have been uncomfortable about being interviewed. They may have influenced one another to be unco-operative, which is unethical. This may have impacted negatively on the interpretation of data. Visiting schools was not always easy as they have their own daily activities and were sometimes unable to find the time to accommodate the researcher.

### **1.9.2 Delimitations**

The Motetema Circuit includes 29 schools, but this study focuses on three secondary schools which were purposefully chosen from the rest. The study focuses on the challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of school safety issues.

## **1.10. Chapter division**

This section indicates the structure and content of each of the chapters in this report.

### **Chapter 1**

This is the opening chapter of the research report. It presents the following aspects: introduction, the research topic, the problem statement, the importance of the research study, the purpose of the study, conceptual framework, theoretical framework, research design, limitations and delimitations of the study.



## **Chapter 2**

This chapter provides an overview of literature on the topic under study. It also provides the theoretical background for the investigation undertaken by the researcher. In summary, this chapter provides the views and findings of other researchers and scholars about the topic under investigation.

## **Chapter 3**

This is the empirical part of the research study and presents the research methodology employed. Methodology includes the data collection plan, which sets out the detailed strategy for collecting data (Vithal & Jansen, 1997, p. 20). The data collection plan includes the following elements: where, when, how and from whom the data was collected.

## **Chapter 4**

This chapter outlines the findings after the data was analysed. In this chapter, data collected as described in the foregoing chapter was transcribed and interpreted.

## **Chapter 5**

This is the concluding chapter which presents the following:

- (i) Responses to the research questions
- (ii) A summary of the findings and their implications
- (iii) Recommendations.

This chapter is followed by the list references which are referred to throughout the study.

### **1.11 Summary**

In this chapter, the problem statement and the rationale behind the research study have been outlined. The importance of this research study is highlighted. The research design is briefly outlined, although the literature review and research methodology are discussed extensively in chapters 2 and 3 respectively (Ramolefe, 2004, p. 14).

The conceptual and theoretical frameworks surrounding this study are clearly defined for the sake of providing understanding and insight. The limitations and delimitations of the study have been highlighted. The structure of the chapters presented in this research report is briefly outlined.

## **Chapter 2 Literature Study**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Creating safe schools is a challenge to all education stakeholders in South Africa. The focus has now shifted to discipline problems, with particular attention being given to the escalation of youth violence. Incidents of violence in schools have been widely reported in the public media, and there is a growing perception of the need to take whatever steps are deemed necessary to assure the safety of students and staff in schools. According to Vesper (2005, p. 61) schools, whether they be urban, suburban or rural, are no longer thought of as safe havens from problems that many children and youths have had to face in their homes and communities. Oosthuizen (2005, p. 37) found that another factor contributing to violence in schools is drug and alcohol use (abuse).

### **2.2 Drafting and formulation of policies at schools**

Section 8(1) of the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) states that a governing body of a public school must adopt a code of conduct for learners after consultation with the learners, parents and educators of the school. This is an indication that there is a need for all governing bodies to contribute to creating safe schools.

According to Oosthuizen (2005, p. 57) the learner has the right to be included in the process of drawing up a code of conduct for his school as section 8(1) of the Act indicates that school governing bodies are entitled to adopt such codes only after consultation with learners, parents and educators. Simultaneously section 8(5) stipulates that such a code of conduct has to contain provisions of “due process” in order to ensure the protection of the rights and interests of the learner or any other party involved in disciplinary proceedings (Oosthuizen, 2005).

Squelch (2000, p. 19) points out that The Schools Act (section 8(1)) recognises the importance of involving the whole school community in developing the code of conduct – in particular parents, educators and learners must be consulted and given an opportunity to offer their input. A discipline policy that is developed by consensus of the school community is more likely to work and be effective, than one that is imposed from above by the principal

or governing body. A participatory decision-making process is likely to ensure a genuine commitment on the part of educators, parents and learners to successfully implement the code. An open discussion with educators, parents and learners will help to uncover a better understanding of their perceptions of, and problems with discipline in the school.

Squelch (2000, p. 19) further observes that involving the whole school community can obviously be a lengthy process, so it needs to be well co-ordinated. She recommends that a special discipline working group be established to organise and co-ordinate the whole process. Parents, educators and learners must be included from the outset and be given the opportunity to discuss, deliberate and review discipline needs and problems in the school. Squelch (2000, p. 19) suggests that the following steps should be followed: Awareness raising, information gathering and consultation, drafting the code of conduct, revising it, implementation and review.

Hurwitz (2006, p. 2) asserts that the creation of safety policies must involve not only students, teachers, administrators and parents, but also law enforcement officers, mental health professionals, business and community leaders, and a wide array of youth-serving professionals in the community. A school safety plan is an all-encompassing programme that provides for safety and security of students and educators (Hurwitz, 2006, p. 2).

### **2.3 How do School Management Teams implement and value school safety policies?**

The literature indicates that teenagers who smoke and use drugs and alcohol are more likely to engage in fighting, stealing, hurting others and other forms of misconduct, than their abstaining peers (De Wet, 2003, p. 171). According to the same author, drug addicts may become involved in a variety of crimes. He suggests that safety policies in schools should be implemented in such a way that they act as a deterrent to all learners and send a clear message of no tolerance of safety threats, to all learners and schools. He further states that a school should be a learning institution and not a breeding ground for criminals.

Sage (2007, p. 1) claims that the biggest threat to school safety is actually the pupils themselves, because they fight against each other. Therefore, school safety must help to ensure that pupils are protected from each other and that teachers are free to teach without fear. Today schools are serving children from dysfunctional homes, children living in

poverty, teenage parents, and special education students (Sage, 2007, p. 1). Parental supervision and control of these students has weakened and many students have diminished respect for all forms of authority, including that of the school (Sage, 2007, p. 2). Therefore, according to Sage (2007), in order to create a safe environment that is conducive to learning, schools must implement safety plans. Young people are legally required to attend school. School personnel or the School Management Team have a corresponding duty to provide children with a safe, secure and peaceful environment in which learning can occur. Basset (2004, p. 41) and De Wet (2002, p. 92) also recommend that School Management Teams should develop school safety plans.

Safety problems and disorder in schools have become major national issues, as reported in various national surveys on school order and safety. These problems not only endanger students and teachers, but also prevent teachers from concentrating on teaching and students from concentrating on learning (Hurwitz, 2006, p. 1). Hurwitz further says that the lack of proper discipline at school can be a threat to school safety as learners who are not doing well at their studies may become frustrated and resort to violence. The safety plan must involve the entire community and both short and long-term measures should be in place (Hurwitz, 2006, p. 2).

School Management Teams must see to it that safety policies are well implemented at school to create an atmosphere conducive to nurturing the well-being of learners, where they feel comfortable and happy. As Hurwitz points out, safe schools may inherit problems from the surrounding community, but when problems of safety are addressed and remedied quickly, the situation can be improved. He further suggests that the roles of the principal, School Management Team, and educators are central in creating safe schools (Hurwitz, 2006, p. 1).

School Management Teams must formulate a plan to deal with overcrowding at schools. Section 5 (5) of the South African Schools Act says that a School Governing Body must draw up an Admission Policy which must be in line with the Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools. Section 34 of the Admission Policy for Ordinary Public Schools states: preference must be given to a learner who lives in the feeder zone of a school or who resides with his or her parents at an employer's home in the feeder zone. Nevertheless, School

Management Teams must control the number of learners enrolled at a school. Overcrowded schools not only make learning much more difficult, but they are also extremely unsafe. Too many children squeezed into schools create tension and stress which can lead to disruptive behaviour. Furthermore, too many students are difficult to supervise (Saunders, 1994, p. 90). Saunders gives an example that occurred in December 1991, when eight young people were trampled and crushed to death and 29 others were injured at the entrance to a gym at City College. They were waiting to enter the gym to watch a charity basket ball game featuring celebrity rock stars, when somehow a stampede started. The people at the front of the line were pressed against a locked door at the bottom of a stairwell. They had no way out. Schools host many wonderful activities such as carnivals, festivals, concerts, dances, ceremonies and sports events (Saunders, 1994), and School Management Teams must be actively involved in making sure that the safety of learners at such events is guaranteed.

School Management Teams should exercise their 'duty of care' in implementing safety policies at schools. Schools must take the problem of criminal activities at schools seriously; if they fail to do this, they may expose themselves to litigation through their failure to fully discharge their duty of care. A school can be found culpable when: (a) a duty of care is established; (b) that duty of care has been breached; (c) that breach has caused injury to the party involved. Morrison (2007, p. 179) remarks that litigation does not heal the emotional scars, nor does it necessarily encourage responsible behaviour; indeed, at an emotional level, the result can cause more harm than good, resulting in further reactionary policies driven by shame and fear. The safety and emotional well-being of students needs to be at the heart of our policy making. The health of all nations and health of their home and security begins with the health of the next generation (Morrison, 2007). The same author suggests that one way of keeping schools safe, and minimising the prospect of litigation from individuals who are bullied, is to cast out the perpetrators. However, suspension has been found to be effective only when the student has received support or participated in a programme that aids their transition to and from the suspension.

Amherst (2000, p. 30) suggests that another approach to crime and violence prevention is for schools to provide training to teachers and other staff. Teacher training could include classroom management, crime prevention, and recognition of early warning signs of potentially violent students. Training should also be given to students with the intention of

reducing certain behaviours, which in turn, will reduce crime and violence in schools. In addition to training students, teachers and staff about violence prevention, many schools involve parents in crime reduction efforts. Schools typically employ specific practices and procedures designed to ensure the safety of students and staff. Some of these practices are intended to limit access to school campuses, while other practices monitor people's behaviour once they are on campus. The vast majority of public schools require visitors to sign or check in when entering the school building, while a few schools also require either students or visitors to pass through metal detectors (Amherst, 2000).

School Management Teams should implement various preventative measures in combating school violence and promoting safety. Louis (2005, p. 8) states that teachers and administrators should remind students that possessing weapons on the school premises is a serious crime. If they are found to be in possession of weapons, they will be subjected to criminal prosecution as well as possible expulsion from the school. They must also be informed that the possession of weapons is against the law. Learners must know that guns are not toys. The purpose of the bullet is to kill. Learners must also be taught that striking someone with an object can destroy their life forever, and that the culprit may end up paying the consequences for the rest of their life (Louis, 2005). The same author further recommends that school assemblies which focus on safety at school are essential. Occasionally guest speakers can be invited to address learners.

Louis (2005) posits that one of the worst things that can happen to a school is to develop a reputation as a place where weapons exist. Such a reputation frightens students, parents and the community. By extenuation, safety problems at school can reduce the degree of support the school can obtain, and teachers can become discouraged and lose their enthusiasm for their students (Louis, 2005). He further says that safe schools have safe environments, and safe environments means fences, lighting, and sometimes locker or book bag searches. In South Africa many schools do not have proper fencing (Louis 2005, p. 8), which is due to a shortage of funds. Good students want safety and have accepted what is necessary for a safe environment.

Naser (2005, p. 62) says that when the school system becomes unsafe and schools become violent environments, it is important that institutions and governments respond

appropriately because such environments violate children's rights and their quality of life. Thus School Management Teams need to make sure that safety policies at school are well implemented (Naser 2005, p. 2). Aggressive behaviour occurs more frequently in more crowded school locations and less frequently in the classroom itself. The size of the community in which the school is located can also influence the rate of violence. During the school day, student violence is more likely to occur between classes. Naser (2005, p. 62) states that chronic "casualty zones" include lavatories, entrance and exit areas, and locker rooms.

Coleman and Webber (2002, p. 292) state that school-wide programmes are essential in ensuring that all children learn about violence prevention. They further suggest that teachers, students and administrators should work together to rid their school of potential safety threats, and school rules which aim to reduce violence should be enforced. Children need to be observed during breaks or on the playground to see how they behave. School safety threats should be reported to the principal and then to the policy makers. If educators or learners notice threats or signs, or overhear discussions about weapons, gang activity, or other conditions that might invite or encourage violence, it should be reported immediately. Another important issue stressed by Coleman and Webber (2002) is to involve parents actively.

Educators, and most importantly the School Management Team, need to take a pro-active role in identifying victims of abuse and in assisting them to deal with the abuse. They should not be passive or quiet about the occurrence of abuse. If School Management Teams suspect that a learner is being harassed, they must act on their assumption and investigate the matter immediately. Schools and educators need to take responsibility for acting effectively and timeously in situations of learner violence (Vienings & Palmary, 2002, p. 39).

## **2.4 Common factors that lead to school safety being compromised**

In recent years, security has become a priority for many public sector buildings, with hospitals and schools topping the list (Sage 2007, p. 1). Sage further says that threats to school safety are complex, broad and manifest, and are displayed in different forms. The situation is often exacerbated by poverty with learners having to attend school hungry.



Schools which are surrounded by villages with socio-economic problems, have high levels of trespassers entering the school premises, according to Sage (2007, p. 1).

Education is adversely affected by the loss of learning and teaching time due to safety related problems in schools (Hurwitz, 2006, p. 1). The safety of schools and prevention of violence, particularly gender-based violence, are enormous challenges facing government, schools and communities. Hurwitz (2006, p. 1) reports on a focused drive to develop school environments in which the sharing of knowledge is enabled – the “Safe Schools” initiative by the Department of Education – which aims to free the school community from fear and risk of victimisation, and to promote the realisation of the potential of all the youth. It is only when the whole community is mobilised, with a common understanding of the importance of all their roles, that we will achieve the essential objective of safe and secure school environments (Vienings & Palmary, 2002, p. 1). The same authors suggest that safety policies should be well known and respected, drugs and weapons be vigorously prohibited, and safety measures taught and reinforced. Everyone should exhibit pride in their school and a sense of ownership. If schools are safe, children can concentrate on learning, not on staying safe or staying alive.

Vienings and Palmary (2002) claim that despite the commitment of government since 1994 to provide resources and improve school conditions, current reports indicate that many schools are still not functioning very well. Not only are schools themselves finding it difficult to keep order and control, but the delivery of state services in support of schools, learners and educators still has a long way to go to achieve the national vision of equality, quality education and justice in schools. The same authors further state that schools in South Africa are battling to provide the quality education required for the holistic and healthy development of young people. Many schools do not offer a nurturing environment to counteract or deal with violence within the community and family. This state of affairs is really a challenge to schools regarding school safety.

Siegel and Senna (2000, p. 360) define socialisation as the process of learning the values and norms of the society or the subculture to which the individual belongs. In this process, a learner becomes a member of the broader social group or community. This membership includes intimate and impersonal experiences at home and in school, and participation in

groups. The family provides primary socialisation, with secondary socialisation being provided by the school and peer groups (Siegel & Senna, 2000, p. 360). This need to provide suitable socialisation opportunities is another challenge to school safety.

A further challenge in terms of school safety, according to Naser (2005, p. 617), is the nature of the community surrounding the school. Schools are part of society, and as society gets more violent, so do our schools. Naser (2005) points out that children are being forced to attend schools which are embedded in violent conditions – the likes of which adults would never tolerate in the work place. He states that, for schools to become less violent, parents, the community and society in general must play a larger role (Naser, 2005, p. 617). A group of parents who are committed to improving safety can do a lot more than just one parent acting on his or her own. The same author further states that school safety should begin at home – parents should teach their children to behave well. The parental style of discipline should not be punitive and harsh. Instead, discipline of the child should be warm and supportive, satisfying the physical and emotional needs of the child. Parents should not allow or encourage their children to use aggression in settling quarrels and achieving their goals. As Nasser (2005) points out, an aggressive approach will translate into how learners interact and behave at school, thus posing a danger to safety at school. If the atmosphere at home is not safe and stable, this is a challenge to school safety.

However, De Jong, Epstein and Hart (2003, p. 15) write that bad things happen even in good communities, quoting the rampage shooting in Edinboro, Pennsylvania, and its aftermath. De Jong et al. (2003) report that at approximately 9:40pm on Friday April 24, 1998, Andrew Jerome Wurst, aged 14, shot and killed the science teacher John J. Gillete, at an eighth grade school dance held in a banquet hall near Parker Middle School just north of Edinboro, Pennsylvania. Armed with his father's 25 calibre semi-automatic pistol, Andrew also wounded another teacher and two classmates. After John Gillete's death, people living in this small lakeside town repeatedly asked themselves: "How could this horrible tragedy happen in such a good community?" Through this example, they infer that safety in schools must be made a priority throughout the whole world, even in safe communities. Educators and learners in any school may be vulnerable to horrible attacks, according to De Jong et al. (2003). This is an indication that safety is a challenge at all schools in South Africa.

A wide body of literature on violence in schools underscores the fact that youth violence is not endemic to South African schools. Coleman and Webber (2002, p. 292) say that since 1997, a series of tragic school shootings has been given unprecedented attention focused on the issue of youth violence. On April 20, 1998, two teens killed 12 classmates and teachers before turning the guns on themselves at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado. Subsequently more research has been directed towards determining what causes youths to become violent and what can be done about it (Coleman & Webber, 2002, p. 292). The same authors state that although the problem of youth violence is not new, the violent crimes committed by the youth have changed qualitatively. The crimes committed by youth are more gruesome and have been committed by children of younger than 15 years old. Children under the ages of 15 are being arrested for violent crimes (Coleman & Webber, 2002, p. 292). Very often crimes are committed by young people under the influence of peer pressure.

Maree (2005, p. 16) states that the following factors contribute to the prevalence of violence in South African schools: The high level of unemployment amongst youth and adults, large discrepancies in wealth and poverty, racial and gender inequality, easy availability of firearms, and particular values and acts. These are further common challenges in terms of school safety.

Furthermore, Druck and Kaplowitz (2005, p. 40) state that violence affects one in every five teenagers. Many youngsters feel threatened – in fact every day 160 000 students miss school because they fear attack, intimidation or bullying. Teachers are also frustrated, and when they are frustrated, they become unproductive which may lead to dysfunctional classroom situations. Teachers should play a prominent role in preventing school violence, starting in their own classroom. There are various daily plans or programmes that teachers can adopt in order to create and maintain a safe and healthy school environment. Resources should be made available for this purpose. Once students learn skills on how to settle conflicts peacefully, they will use these skills regularly, and are likely to teach them to others.

Lindle (2008, p. 28) states that parents are concerned about the safety of their children at schools. However, as Lindle (2008) explains, the media plays a role in generating public fear

by reporting on incidents at schools. He further states that issues of school safety and student discipline provide the foundation for public confidence and that the security of schools is inexorably linked to neighbourhoods. Behavioural characteristics such as anger, jealousy, greed, depression and low self-esteem may be indicative of a youth's proclivity towards violence and this can lead to risky behaviour such as revenge, bullying, substance abuse, and may ultimately end with weapon carrying and violence. Lindle (2008, p. 28) suggests that seeing other students with weapons increases student fears and he argues that there is therefore a need for the government, together with other stakeholders, to pledge themselves to tighten school security.

The Star newspaper reported that a teenager's dream was cut short by a stabbing at a birthday party and the matter raised concerns about violence in schools, especially at wealthier ones (Serrao, 2008, p. 1). He further confirms that violence is increasing in all Gauteng schools: a learner at King Edward VIII School, one of Johannesburg's top schools was killed in a vicious attack, and in October 2006, a 19-year-old boy was murdered in a brutal stabbing by a fellow student at Forest High School, also in Johannesburg. A study by the University of Johannesburg found that schools in Gauteng are beset by radicalised games, gambling, and bullying, and pupils who are not scared to use weapons on one another (Pillay & Ragpot, 2008).

Pillay and Ragpot (2008) further indicate that children who bring iPods, PSPs and expensive cell phones are targeted by children who want these items, whilst in poorer areas, violence happens over money and food. Listed among the causes of violence in schools are absenteeism, lack of respect for schoolteachers, overcrowded classrooms, gambling, jealousy of others' belongings, racism, gangsters, substance abuse, and children who are victims of violence at home. It was also found that children in Gauteng schools, particularly males, are forming and joining gangs. The same authors report that in one school two girls started to fight over a boy in class. The teacher was writing on the chalkboard when she heard a noise. When she turned around, the two girls were stabbing each other in the face with pens. Pillay and Ragpot (2008) said that what shocked them the most was the attitude of youngsters who are prone to violence and who use weapons on each other. "The acts of violence are more serious. They carry knives with intentions of using them," said Pillay. Pillay asserts that more violence is going to occur in most schools in future, which will disturb

their smooth running. Some incidents are not reported, since it takes a lot of time and paper work to open such cases. More research should be conducted to expose these situations.

Another researcher, Engelbrecht (2008), reports that the Department of Education was called in to intervene after racial tension broke out at local high school. The tension started with a fight between two learners, one in grade 12 and the other in grade 9, outside the school grounds on a Thursday afternoon. A knife was allegedly used during the fight. On Friday morning, there was a heavy police presence at the school and learners were searched for weapons. The same author recommends that the Department of Education, together with educators, should nip the problem of school violence while still in the bud (Engelbrecht, 2008).

## **2.5 How do schools deal with carrying weapons to school?**

A study conducted in 20 schools in the Cape Metropolitan area found possession of weapons to be a major problem (De Wet, 2003, p. 169). Guns are carried to school as toys, to show off, or for the purpose of self-defense, and boys bring guns to school to protect their girlfriends from gangsters (De Wet, 2003, p. 114). The same author found that learners even buy and sell firearms at school, and besides guns, other weapons that are carried to school include knives, pangas, sticks, screwdrivers and axes.

Maxwell and Lesli (2006, p. 2) found that in many communities local law enforcement officers have stepped up their presence. In some schools, educators have taken to enforcing security precautions with renewed attention, such as locking doors and checking in visitors. Maxwell and Lesli (2006) propose that gates should be locked, security officers hired, and school employees monitor all entrances. They highlight several shooting incidents, which occurred in schools in the USA, such as when a 53-year-old gunman took six female students hostage, sexually assaulted them, and killed one before shooting himself in a classroom at Platte Canyon High School in Bailey, Colorado. Two days later, Eric Hainstack, 15, fatally shot his principal at Weston High School in Cazenova, Wisconsin, a farming community about 70 miles northwest of Madison. They argue, however, that any new safety policies and increased security measures should be adopted in a thoughtful way, without turning schools into fortresses (Maxwell & Lesli, 2006, p. 3).

Maxwell and Lesli (2006) report that between the school years 1992-93 and 2001-02, students killed 116 people in school violence in the USA. The brutality of the shootings has created new anxieties for students, parents, school leaders and the police. The same authors suggest that there is a need to review safety policies at schools, to limit outsiders' access to school buildings, and to have emergency plans and guidelines on what to do when something happens. As these authors point out, even school principals can be victims of school violence.

The carrying of guns and other weapons at school increases the chances that violent conflict will result in injury or death. A key component to building safe schools is to ensure that the school becomes a gun-free zone. Notices such as: 'No Entry with the following: guns, knives and weapons' should be displayed in schools (Vienings & Palmary, 2002, p. 27). The same authors recommend that to develop a programme to reduce gun use at school, managers need to first map out the causes and effects of the problem, and the extent of weapons possession. Often this is difficult to assess, as educators may be unaware of the number of learners and educators who carry weapons.

In order to gain information about the number of learners and educators in possession of guns, the following questions are suggested:

- Who are the main perpetrators? Are any groups of learners regularly threatened or do certain groups threaten others?
- Where do learners get guns? Is there a particular person who could be supplying them, do some learners possess them legally, or are they taken from family members?
- How are learners getting money to acquire guns?

Answering these questions may assist School Management Teams in implementing safety policies at schools. Partnerships can also be established with the local police, the School Governing Body, the gun control alliance, and parents. Some schools have addressed the problem by setting up anonymous hotlines for learners to provide information about others

who are carrying guns. Where possible, rewards are offered to learners who call with information. Although the school may be instrumental in setting up such a hotline, it should be co-ordinated from a police station (Vienings & Palmary, 2002, p. 29). Some schools have developed curricula that help learners assess the risks of handgun ownership, resolve conflict without violence, and generally make safer decisions.

Vienings and Palmary (2002) further recommend that schools can start an aggressive educational campaign to show learners the effects that guns have, and the risks that they take by carrying them. Suggestions are to get learners to sign a pledge that other schools can also sign, stating that they will act against guns and gun violence. Ensure that the learners themselves write the pledge.

Barton (2009, p. 30) states that students learn when they are in a safe and supportive environment, so schools should be free of any potential harm or danger. She advises principals to develop a proactive approach to school safety. The same author further says that a safe school is a place where the business of education can be conducted in a welcoming environment, free of intimidation, violence and fear. Such a setting provides an educational climate and due care for every child. It is a place free of bullying, where behaviour expectations are clearly communicated, consistently enforced, and fairly applied.

Barton (2009) indicates that safe schools possess the following characteristics:

- A team-developed safe school plan and implementation strategy
- A committed administration that allocates resources for implementing the safe school plan
- Teaching and support staff with positive relationships and effective methods of communicating with their students, adults in the building, and parents/guardians
- Comprehensive students programming to reduce violent and aggressive behaviour e.g. (peer mediation, problem solving)
- Programmes and policies that address implicit forms of violence and aggression between and among students – implicit forms include bullying and biased-based violence.

- Clean environments both inside and adjacent to buildings
- Commitment to a culture of learning with high academic standards and civil, respectful classrooms
- Partnerships with the community, including the business communities surrounding the school (Barton, 2009, p. 89).

The same author further recommends that schools should have safe school plans that are user-friendly and up-to-date, and whose contents are communicated to and practised by school staff through table-top exercises. A well-planned and executed safety plan creates a learning environment that is both physically and emotionally safe for students, staff and administrators. School leaders must allocate resources for prevention and intervention strategies designed to create safe schools. Safe schools have teaching and support staff with positive relationships and effective methods of communicating with their students, adults in the building, and parents/guardians. Furthermore schools with a commitment to a culture of learning, that possesses high academic standards and that demand civil and respectful classrooms tend to be safe. Safe schools have high rates of academic success.

Schools must be able to depend on the surrounding community to assist with school safety issues, because communities benefit from safe schools and are negatively affected by unsafe schools. Partnerships with local businesses can also be extremely important in school safety programs, according to Barton (2009, p. 14). She suggests that safe schools provide local business with well-educated customers, a well-trained potential workforce, and quality education for children of their employees.

## **2.6 The role of the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety**

The most appropriate way of dealing with school violence is to design, in collaboration with all the relevant stakeholders, a safe school plan. These stakeholders comprise those persons located within the school and the surrounding community, and should include educators, learners, parents, law enforcement officials, education decision makers, business and community leaders, and a wide array of youth-serving professionals (Stephens, 1998, p. 53) This recommendation suggests that student representative council cannot be ignored when



policies which affect them, are drawn up in a school. They must participate so that they can convey a message to other learners. In addition, Stephen (1998) maintains that safe school planning is an inclusive and co-operative activity. Learner representative councils must be one of the essential stakeholders in designing a safe school plan; in other words student leadership must accept their responsibility (Stephens, 1998). Partnerships with the SAPS and the community are recommended, in addition to the student representative council.

The Learner Representative Council (LRC) can take the lead in solving conflicts through mediation, instead of violence. The LRC can be involved in addressing learners about incidents at school, and can also assist in getting learners to work together on projects like musical bands, sports, yearbooks, clubs and other activities. It is also the duty of the LRC to develop a system for reporting all crimes to the principal (Saunders, 1994, p. 49). Since students want and are entitled to a safe, orderly school environment in which to learn, they should develop a sense of responsibility for contributing to the improvement of school order and safety. Members of all peer groups, including the LRC should participate actively in the planning, implementation and enforcement of discipline policy and programmes, according to Saunders (1994).

## **2.7 Dealing with shooting, stabbing, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunch time duties**

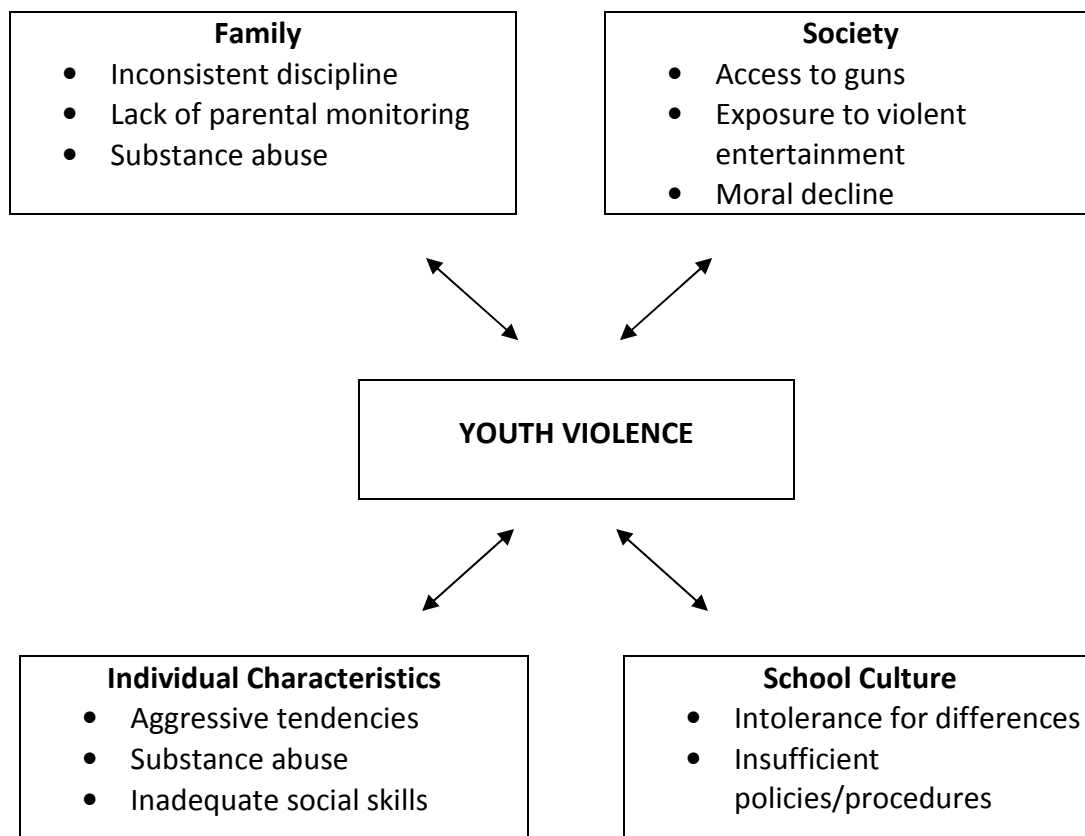
De Lange (2010) reports that the Gauteng Education MEC has been ordered to pay an interim amount of R400 000 to a Midrand businessman, who instituted a R1,6 million damages case against the department. This claim resulted after his 16-year-old son lost an eye in a playground accident at his school. The father of the child also sued the governing body of the school, as well as the father of the pupil allegedly responsible for the accident (De Lange, 2010, p. 8). The claim was instituted after an incident at the schools' after-care centre when the perpetrator allegedly threw a sharp ceramic tile off-cut at his fellow pupil, striking him in his left eye.

The father of the victim claimed that teachers at the after-care centre had been negligent because they failed to properly supervise pupils; in particular they failed to prevent young pupils from accessing dangerous builders' rubble on the school premises. The victim suffered such severe injuries to his eye that he had to undergo numerous painful

operations, including a corneal transplant, in an attempt to save the eye. The transplant was, however, rejected and the young pupil eventually suffered permanent loss of vision in his left eye and had to be fitted with a false eye for cosmetic purposes. The pupil suffered severe pain after sustaining the injuries and will, according to court papers, suffer permanent ongoing pain and discomfort in future. He will also be limited in his future choice of career and employment (De Lange, 2010, p. 8).

Barton (2009, p. 14) summarises the factors which contribute to youth violence and safety problems at school according to the following categories:

**Figure 2.1: Youth violence leading to safety problems at school, Barton (2009, p. 14)**



According to Barton (2009, p. 15), the characteristics of youth offenders who threaten school safety can be listed as follows:

- “Social withdrawal: In some situations, gradual and eventual complete withdrawal from social contacts can be an important indicator of a troubled child.

- Excessive feelings of isolation and being alone: The majority of children who are isolated and appear to be friendless are not violent. However, in some cases, feelings of isolation and not having friends are associated with children who behave aggressively and violently.
- Excessive feelings of rejection: In the process of growing up, and in the course of adolescent development, many young people experience emotionally painful rejection. Some aggressive children seek out aggressive friends, who in turn reinforce their violent tendencies.
- Being a victim of violence: Children who have been victims of violence, including physical or social abuse in the community, at school, or at home, are sometimes at risk of becoming violent towards themselves or others.
- Low school interest and poor academic performance: Poor achievement can be the result of many factors. It is important to consider whether there is a drastic change in performance.
- Affiliation with gangs: Gangs which support antisocial values and behaviours, including extortions, intimidation and acts of violence towards other students, cause fear and stress among other students. Youth who are influenced by these groups, including those who emulate and copy their behaviour, as well as those who become affiliated with them, may adopt their values and act in violent or aggressive ways in certain situations.
- Inappropriate access to, possession of, and use of firearms: Children and youth who inappropriately have access to firearms can have increased risk for violence and they are a danger to school safety.”

Barton (2009) further states that for a school leader, an important first step towards creating safe school communities is the development of a school safety team. She describes a school safety team as a group of individuals empowered by school leadership to provide guidance and respond to issues of school safety. School safety teams represent members of the community who share a comprehensive mission to produce a safer school and better learning environment through a variety of means, including a school safety plan and a crisis response plan.

Saunders (1994, p. 56) advises that if there are discipline problems at a school, concerned individuals might want to establish a committee comprising the principal, parents, teachers, students and even local law enforcement officials to investigate what can be done. If there is no written school policy on discipline, the first task of the committee, working with the administration, would be to prepare one. Parents and schools should know the difference between actions that require school disciplinary measures, and actions that are criminal and require the involvement of law enforcement agencies. The distinction must be clearly stated in the policy, with examples of crimes needing police intervention, namely assault, vandalism, extortion, arson, and use of weapons (Saunders, 1994, p. 57).

The same author recommends that the policy should clearly detail examples of actions to be taken, divided between the first occurrence and any repeated occurrence. Each action can have minimum and maximum consequences, which can range from an informal talk to parents, to a conference with all parties, a short suspension, a long suspension, or finally expulsion from the school. The new policy and contract should be publicised amongst the school community so that all parents and teachers are aware of it. If detention and suspension do not seem to have an effect, Saunders (1994) recommends forming a group to establish an in-school alternative learning centre. These centres are good solutions to discipline problems because they keep disruptive students in school while separating them from other students. If a particular child consistently requires discipline at school, psychological testing should be requested. Often this can be arranged through the school at no charge to parents. Psychological testing can help to identify some possible causes of a child's disruptive behaviour, according to Saunders (1994).

To deal with crisis issues, schools should find out which teachers have had training in first aid, since school emergency plans usually assume that teachers will be able to perform first aid. Unfortunately, most teachers are not trained in these or other emergency skills. Children should also be trained to understand and deal with many different types of emergency situations.

*"They are fine when they are with me. But when they step outside the walls of my classroom, their behaviour falls apart,"* says an educator. It is a common lament. Many teachers succeed in teaching children to be calm and respectful in the classroom, only to have the children

“lose it” in other areas of the school building. That was the case at Kensington Avenue School in Springfield, Massachusetts, where teachers began using the responsive classroom approach about a decade ago. Although the children’s classroom behaviour improved, their behaviour elsewhere in the school remained largely unchanged. Recess was not only filled with conflicts that inevitably made their way back into classroom, but many students simply had no idea what to do during this time. Hesitant to join one of the highly competitive and physical games that typically dominated recess, they wandered aimlessly around the playground, interacting with no one. The resulting feeling of alienation often led to conflicts later in the day. Lunchtime was not much better. It was noisy and chaotic and filled with mishaps (Nash, 2006, p. 43). To address the problem, a committee of teachers, other staff and parents met and decided to offer professional development to the lunch staff, or “lunch teachers”, as they are called at Kensington. They asked lunch teachers to come to school early one day for a mini-workshop. The lunch teachers – a combination of parents, para-professionals and others – were compensated at their regular wage for attending the workshop. The committee reasoned that consistency should help students to carry their calm and respectful classroom behaviour into the lunch rooms (Nash, 2006, p. 49-50).

## **2.8 Monitoring safety of learners at school**

### **2.8.1 Preventative measures**

Bodenstein and Potterton (2002, p. 20) advise that one can reduce the risks that learners face at school in the following ways: “Supervise the access to grounds and buildings. Ensure that there is supervision at critical times such as breaks and immediately before and after school. Make sure that educators supervise the changing of classes. Do not allow learners to leave the school during school hours. Learners should be prohibited from gathering in areas where they are likely to engage in aggressive behaviour. Monitor the areas surrounding the school grounds, check the safety of your buildings and ask the social fire fighting service to assist. Ask the local police to ensure that there are safe routes to and from school”.

Various broad preventative and reactive approaches to school violence are identified by Naser (2005). Preventative approaches include the teaching of life skills and changing school environments in a way that will decrease the likelihood of violent events occurring. Reactive approaches attempt to respond to school violence once it has occurred. Preventative

approaches offer much more promise in that they provide a strategy for reducing the incidence of school violence. Reactive approaches tend to rely on tough disciplinary action and punishment. Will and Neufeld (2002, p. 51-54) found that a “zero tolerance” approach tends to remove the learners’ responsibility in the school environment, and that relying on punitive measures does not generally result in lower rates of violence in school settings.

De Wet (2002, p. 44) mentions a lack of empathy on the part of some South African educators regarding school violence. She refers, for example, to an eight-year-old Brakpan learner who was physically and verbally abused by classmates for six months. When the facts of the violence became known, the principal of the school failed to take disciplinary measures against the alleged perpetrators, or to grant the request of the victim’s parents to place the two learners in two separate classes. “Indeed, the principal’s response to the parents’ request suggests that among some educators in the country, there is ambivalence and a certain unwillingness to condemn school violence” (De Wet, 2002, p. 44). I agree with De Wet’s view because in my experience at our school, teachers begin to educate their students, without first establishing discipline and maintaining order. Apart from education, the school has the obligation to protect pupils from mistreatment by other students whose conduct in recent years has prompted national concern.

Youth gangs pose a great threat to both personal and public safety. Therefore creating safe schools is not a simple matter of adding more security and swifter or harsher punishments. Research should be conducted because schools are situated in different contexts: we should always ask ourselves the questions: Why do people behave the way they do? What is the underlying culture of that community? The Department of Education also has a role to play in creating safe schools, according to De Wet (2002).

De Wet (2002, p. 44) claims that without ensuring safety, our schools will never achieve their educational mission and produce productive citizens. It is worth identifying youths who have extreme behavioural difficulties early in their educational careers, as such learners require additional support. Learners who are arrested during adolescence usually become school dropouts and join gangs. Morrison (1993, p. 3) states that safety is a basic need that must be met in order for a child to achieve the cognitive outcomes expected at school. However, there are still challenges in schools in terms of implementing safety, a fact which

is underscored by the number of learners killed at schools (Morrison, 1993, p. 3). My assumption is that improvement in South African schools depends on the proper implementation of safety policies. This is an area of research which demands consideration and has the potential for opening up new avenues for investigation.

Coleman and Webber (2002, p. 292) suggest that educators should be aware of the warning signs of violence. They should familiarise themselves with warning signs in “at-risk” pupils, which may include social withdrawal, feelings of rejection, uncontrollable anger, expression of violence in writings or drawings, affiliation with guns, and making threats of serious violence. The same authors suggest that educators need to be made aware of their school’s resources for dealing with children who exhibit this sort of behaviour. School resources often include meeting with a guidance councillor or school mental health professional, or referral of the pupil for outside psychological treatment.

### **2.8.2 Places where violence occurs**

Chuenyane (2008) claims that toilets are the most dangerous places at school where violence can occur. He reports on a study conducted by the Department of Education and UNICEF which researched 65 schools across the country. The study uncovered alarming trends of violence, which warrant urgent attention. The Centre for Justice and Crime Prevention, which visited the schools, found that the toilets were identified as the most dangerous places at schools in seven of the nine provinces in South Africa, with the exception of the North West Province and the Northern Cape. The report says that toilets often act as a point where groups of boys gather, which often leads to girl learners being threatened and intimidated (Chuenyane, 2008). In the majority of the schools visited, the boys’ and girls’ toilets were located next to each other, making it easier for boys to harass the girls when they went to the toilets.

The same report claims that money is often demanded in the toilets. Many girls have also joined gangs, so the female toilets become highly unsafe and there are fights after school if victims do not pay the money demanded. The report states that at several schools in the nine provinces, female learners identified the stairwells as places that they were scared of because groups of boys stood there in the dark, in between classes and breaks, and harassed them verbally or physically. This was done in the presence of educators and other

adults (Chuenyane, 2008). The study also found that the area around school gates is also a most unsafe place.

## **2.9 Safety of learners during strikes by educators**

The Labour Relations Act (Section 64) (Republic of South Africa, 1995) acknowledges different forms of industrial action by employees, including strikes, picketing and protest action to promote the socio-economic interests of workers. Section 23 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Republic of South Africa, 1996a) grants all employees the right to strike. Educators are thus entitled to go on strike, but they must make sure that learners are not neglected.

Xaba (2010, p. 4) reports that the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU) threatened violence during a strike in Johannesburg during 2010. The Johannesburg Central Region branch announced at a rally at Soweto's ELKA stadium that they would be taking the fight to northern suburbs schools as the strike entered its second week. SADTU leaders said they expected teachers to report on schools they would disrupt when they met that day: *"All those schools that are still operating must be shut down,"* said the SADTU regional secretary, targeting schools which were still teaching.

The same author further reports that police arrested four strikers in a protest march to stop learning and teaching at a Model C school in Tzaneen. A group of about 100 protestors arrived at the school and asked the principal to open the gates so that they could stop the teaching. Police arrested four strikers who tried to open the gate. The suspects were released following an intervention by union leaders on condition that they advise their members not to use strong words during protests (Xaba, 2010, p. 4).

Such actions indicate that when educators are on strike, the safety of learners is often at risk. Learners cannot be expected to maintain control themselves. This becomes a serious threat, particularly in schools with high enrolment. Learners were encouraged by departmental leaders at provincial levels to form study groups at schools, even though their safety could not be guaranteed.

Many violent incidents take place in the absence of educators, especially during a strike. These incidents may include rape, sexual battery other than rape, physical attacks or fights



with or without a weapon, threats of physical attack with or without a weapon, and robberies with or without a weapon (Amherst, 2000, p. 24).

## **2.10 Themes derived from the literature review**

The following themes emerged from the literature review and have been discussed in this chapter:

- The partnership between the Department of Safety and Security and the Department of Education
- The involvement of community structures to ensure safety at schools
- The responsibility of the School Governing Body in connection with school safety
- The importance of a code of conduct for learners
- The impact of school safety in South African schools
- The kinds of violence which can occur at schools, and which can threaten school safety
- The kinds of weapons which can threaten school safety
- Dangerous places in a school
- Teacher strikes and the safety of learners
- Drafting and formulating school safety policies
- Challenges regarding school safety
- The role played by learners in terms of safety issues at school.

## Chapter 3 Research design and methodology

### 3.1 Introduction

Research design refers to a plan for selecting subjects and research sites, and data collection procedures to answer the research question(s) (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 166). The research design will identify which individuals are to be studied, as well as when, where and under which circumstances they will be studied. This planning is done in order to ensure credibility and reliability. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003, p. 75) highlight the following questions that need to be addressed when thinking about a research design:

- What is the specific purpose of the research?
- How are the general research purpose and aims operationalised into a specific research question?
- What needs to be the focus, in order to answer the research questions?
- What is the main methodology adopted by the research?
- How will validity and reliability be addressed?
- What kind of data is required?
- From whom will data be acquired (i.e. sampling)?
- Where else will data be available (e.g. documentary sources)?
- How will the data be gathered?
- Who will undertake the research?

Data need to be collected in order to conduct empirical research. Hoberg (1999, p. 75) describes research as a systematic attempt to provide answers to questions and selected problems.

The goal of this qualitative research study, as described by McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 396) is that it is concerned first and foremost with understanding particular social phenomena from the participants' perspective. The researcher becomes a participant in the experiences of the participants by using interactive strategies. This research study is based on a constructivist philosophy that assumes reality to be "multi-layered, interactive and a shared social experience interpreted by individuals" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 396). School Management Teams from sampled schools were approached to interact with

the researcher and share their experiences in terms of safety at schools in the Motetema Circuit. Thus multi-layered data containing rich information was generated.

### **3.1.1 Qualitative Approach**

In this study I used a qualitative approach because, according to McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 393), it extends the understanding of a phenomenon and contributes to improved educational practice, policy making and social consciousness.

A qualitative approach is considered to be the most suitable approach for this study because it provided comprehensive information that can be used to capacitate secondary School Management Teams in the study area. However, qualitative research is only as good as the researcher. The researcher requires skill, patience and wisdom in obtaining the information necessary during the data collection stage and field work, in order to produce a rich qualitative study. A good qualitative researcher must learn to be trusted, be patient and tolerant, and wait until his respondents accept him. Flexibility and resilience on the part of the researcher are also required (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001, p. 166).

Three senior secondary schools were selected in the Motetema Circuit because of the frequency of safety problems in these schools and the number of cases reported to the police station. The area is suitable for the study because of the violent nature of the area.

## **3.2 Data Collection Plan**

A data collection plan sets out in detail a strategy for collecting data. Schulze (2002, p. 56) mentions interviews, observations and document analysis as methods frequently used in qualitative studies. In the light of this suggestion, the following methods were adopted for this study: interviews, observation and document analysis.

Both individual and group focus interviews were conducted, focusing mainly on problem identification and safety issues. Individual interviews were conducted with members of the School Management Teams. Other interviews were conducted with individual educators where necessary.

Each of the data collection methods used in this study is discussed in further detail in the following sections.

## 3.3 Interviews

### 3.3.1 What is an interview?

Interviews are the primary source of data collection in qualitative research. “The use of the interview in research marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individuals, and towards regarding knowledge as generated between humans, often through conversations” (Kvale, 1996, cited by Cohen et al., 2003, p. 267). “Interviews enable participants – be they interviewers or interviewees – to discuss their interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regard situations from their own point of view (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 267).

### 3.3.2 The purpose of an interview

The research interview may serve three purposes according to Cohen et al. (2003, p. 268). Firstly, it may be the principal means of gathering information, in order to address the research objectives. Tuckman (1972, cited by Cohen et al., p. 268) describes the interview as “providing access to what is ‘inside a person’s head’”, thus making it possible “to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences), and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)”.

Secondly an interview can be used to test hypotheses or to suggest new avenues for investigation; or as an explanatory device to highlight possible variables and relationships between participants or variables. “And third, the interview may be used in conjunction with other methods in a research undertaking” (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 268). The same authors classify interviews depending on their degree of formality:

- formal interviews – specific questions are asked and the answers recorded on a standardised schedule
- less formal interviews – the interviewer may change the sequence of questions, or the wording, explain the questions more fully, or add explanatory comments
- completely informal interviews – the interviewer may have several key issues in mind, without any interview schedule, and the interview is conducted in a conversational style.

According to Cohen et al. (2003, p. 270), there are different kinds of interviews, including

- standardised interviews
- in-depth interviews
- ethnographic interviews
- elite interviews
- life history interviews
- focus groups.

### **3.3.3 Advantages of interviews**

Interviews allow for greater depth than is the case with other methods of data collection. In other words, they offer a good 'rate of return'. Interviews generally yield a higher response rate than questionnaires because respondents become more involved, and hence tend to be more motivated. Interviews enable the researcher to describe the research more extensively than would usually be mentioned in a covering letter to a questionnaire, and they are better than questionnaires in allowing the interviewer to handle more difficult and open-ended questions. The data collected tends to be more comprehensive and more systematic for each respondent. Logical gaps in data can be anticipated and closed by the interviewer as they occur (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 271). I believe that in this study I was able to obtain more information from School Management Teams in terms of school safety in the Motetema Circuit through interviews than would have been possible using other data collection methods.

### **3.3.4 Disadvantages of interviews**

Besides their advantages, interviews are prone to subjectivity and bias on the part of the interviewer. Although the interviewer has the advantage of being flexible in sequencing and wording the questions, this can result in substantially different responses from various interviewees, thus reducing the comparability of the responses (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 271).

## **3.4 Observation**

Cohen et al. (2003, p. 305) point out that "observational data are attractive as they afford the researcher the opportunity to gather 'live' data from 'live' situations". Citing Patton

(1990), Cohen et al. (2003, p. 305) go on to observe that “the researcher is given the opportunity to look at what is taking place *in situ* rather than at second hand. This enables researchers to ... discover things that participants might not freely talk about in interview situations”. Observations, it is argued (Morrison, 1993, p. 80), enable the researcher to gather data on: the human setting (e.g. the organisation of people); the characteristics and make up of the groups or individuals being observed (for instance gender, class); the interactional setting (e.g. the interactions that are taking place, formal, informal, planned, unplanned, verbal, non-verbal); the physical setting (e.g. the physical environment and its organisation); and the programme setting (e.g. the resources and their organisation). There are two types of observation, namely structured observation and naturalistic observation. Naturalistic observation was suitable for this study in that it enabled me to gather rich and thick data.

### **3.5 Document analysis**

Eberlein (2009, p. 57) recommends that every public school in South Africa should, as a matter of good management practice and according to sections 9(4) and 9(5) of the Amended Regulations (2006) of the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b), develop an action plan or school safety policy “...to counter threats of violence which have the potential to have a negative impact on school activities.... .” This policy or plan “...must ensure the safety of all learners, staff members and parents during school activities.”

I requested the principals of the three sampled schools to provide me with their safety policies and punishment books which were then studied. This was done after the completion of the interviews and observation visits. The analysis was done with reference to the South African Schools Act (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) and the regulations mentioned above, in order to check the compliance of the three schools with the Schools Act. The purpose of studying the punishment books was to evaluate if measures taken are in line with the regulations on how to deal with misconduct by learners.

## 3.6 Research parameters for data collection

Vithal and Jansen (1997, p. 20) view the second step of the data collection plan as setting out the ‘parameters’ for each of the critical questions under study. ‘Parameters’ refer to decisions about what data to collect, from whom, how often etc. (Ramolefe, 2004, p. 36). In this study data about challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of safety issues was generated from three schools in the Motetema Circuit. Schools with a high number of cases recorded at the nearest police station were selected. An interview schedule indicating school, date and time was drawn up, and is presented in Appendix 3.

### 3.6.1 Sampling

The quality of a piece of research not only stands or falls by the appropriateness of the methodology and instrumentation, but also by the suitability of the sampling strategy adopted (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 92). According to the same authors, questions of sampling arise directly out of defining the population on which the research will focus. Sampling is the process by means of which participants are selected for the study.

Judgements have to be made about four key factors in terms of sampling (Cohen et al., 2003, p. 92):

- “the sample size
- the representativeness and parameters of the sample
- access to the sample
- the sampling strategy to be used”.

In terms of sampling, the following aspects need to be considered:

#### Population

A population is the total set of individuals or units of study from which the researcher can choose to include in a sample (De Vos, 1998, p. 190). These individuals or ‘units of analysis’ should share a common set of characteristics. Semelane (1998, p. 22) identifies two types of populations, namely the target population and an accessible population. A portion of the target population to which the researcher has reasonable access is known as the accessible population (Semelane, 1998, p. 22). The target population of this study

was Motetema Circuit secondary schools in the Greater Sekhukhune District, Limpopo Province. The accessible population was the School Management Teams in three particular secondary schools which were selected on the basis of the number of cases reported at the nearest police station.

### **Sampling methods**

Purposeful sampling was adopted for this study, by selecting those schools which often report cases to the nearest police station. Ramolefe (cited by McMillan and Schumacher, 2001, p. 400) asserts that purposeful sampling is the process of selecting information-rich cases for in-depth study. McMillan and Schumacher (2001, p. 401) maintain that this method is important in that:

- it increases the utility of information obtained from small samples
- it requires that information be obtained about variations among the subject before the sample is chosen.

The sample participants are chosen because they are likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon being investigated, i.e. experience of SMTs in terms of school safety. The power and the logic of purposeful sampling is that a few cases studied in depth usually yield many insights about the topic.

### **Sampling criteria**

The participants in the study satisfy the following criteria:

- they have School Management Teams
- according to police, they are schools with safety challenges/problems
- the SMTs are composed of educators who speak and understand English and Sepedi.

### **Sample size**

Cohen et al. (2003, p. 93) state that there is no clear-cut answer in terms of any one correct sample size – it depends on the style of the research, the purpose of the study, the nature of the population and the extent of scrutiny required.



### **3.6.2 Data Collection Methods**

As discussed in detail above, the following data collection methods were used in this research: interviews, document analysis and observation. In terms of document analysis, safety policies at the sampled schools were analysed, punishment books were studied, and minutes of disciplinary hearings were investigated.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In this chapter, the research design and steps in the data collection plan followed in this study have been outlined, providing justification as to why particular research methods were adopted. I clearly outlined the area where the study was conducted, the sampling methods and the data gathering strategies that were used, being relevant to the topic under investigation.

In summary this chapter details the 'what', 'who', 'where' and 'how' aspects of the research study. The next chapter presents the findings of this study.

## Chapter 4 Presentation of the research findings

### 4.1 Introduction

Various forms of data collection strategies were used in this study, namely interviews, document analysis and observation. The topic of investigation is: What are the challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of school safety issues in the Motetema Circuit?

Three schools were visited in the area of study. In the interests of confidentiality and in order to prevent the possible identification of any particular school, the three schools are referred to simply as school A, school B and school C. Schools were named in the order of fieldwork visits conducted.

The interview schedule and observation schedule are presented below, and in Appendix 3:

#### Interview Schedule

SCHOOL	DATE	TIME
School A	8 November 2010	13:00 – 15:00
School B	9 November 2010	13:00 – 15:00
School C	10 November 2010	13:00 – 15:00

#### Observation Schedule

SCHOOL	DATE	TIME	ITEMS OBSERVED
School A	15 November 2010	7:30 – 12:00	Learners during free period
School B	16 November 2010	8:00 – 13:00	Learners on the sports ground
School C	17 November 2010	9:00 – 14:00	Learners during break and after school

All School Management Teams responded to the interviews. The instructions and the purpose of the research were clarified before the educators were interviewed.

The following general biographical data was recorded for each school:

DESCRIPTOR	SCHOOL A	SCHOOL B	SCOOOL C
Type of school	Secondary	Secondary	Secondary
Quintile	One	One	One
Geographical location	Rural	Rural	Rural
Number of learners enrolled in the school	700-800	500-600	800-1000
School's annual LDP subsidy (Rand)	300 000-400 000	300 000-350 000	500 000-600 000
Amount budgeted for security per year	5000	10 000	10 000
Number of educators employed at the school	24-30	18-25	33-40
Principal's experience in education (years)	21-25	15-20	20-30
Principal's experience as a principal (years)	5-10	6-10	15-20

This data was gathered during the opening few minutes of the interview with each of the three principals. In a further attempt to prevent the identification of individual schools, this data is tabulated for each school in the form of ranges rather than using actual numbers.

The research findings for each of the three schools are presented in the sections that follow under the following headings:

### **Observation results**

The carefully recorded results of the observation visit to each of the three schools are the focus of these sections. The discussion is presented (per school) under the headings planning, organising, leading and controlling. In the sections on controlling, the following issues are reported on:

- a) Toilets, gates and fencing
- b) Condition of doors, windows and buildings in general
- c) Condition of the common areas
- d) Presence of dangers such as sharp objects, broken chairs etc.
- e) General observations relating to school safety
- f) Break duty as indicated by a break duty roster
- g) General behaviour and demeanour of learners
- h) Emergency equipment
- i) Access control procedures
- j) Office procedures for visitors
- k) Office procedures for dealing with illness, injury or emergencies
- l) Procedures after school.

### **Interview responses**

This section presents each School Management Team's responses to the interview questions which focused on the challenges they face in terms of school safety. The data gathered during the interviews is reported in response to the following research sub-questions which made up the interview schedule itself:

- a) How do you draft and formulate safety policies?
- b) How do you implement school safety policies?
- c) What are the common factors that lead to safety being compromised?
- d) How do you deal with carrying weapons to school?
- e) How do you deal with bullying?
- f) What is the role of the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety?
- g) Do you have rules for dealing with crisis issues such as shootings, stabbings, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunch time duties?
- h) How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school?
- i) How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school during strikes by educators?

## **Document analysis**

Each school's individual school safety policy, punishment books and any other records of safety issues at school were analysed and the findings are discussed per school in section 4.5.

## **4.2 School A**

### **4.2.1 Observation results**

#### **Observation regarding planning**

According to the guidelines on How to Manage School Records – Volume I, each time disciplinary action is taken against a learner, an individual record of learner misconduct should be completed for the relevant learner. This record provides the details of the misconduct by providing a description of the errant behaviour and rating it in terms of seriousness. The disciplinary consequences and actions taken are also recorded and the parent/guardian is required to sign the form as acknowledgement of the misconduct and consequent disciplinary action. In school A there was no clear plan to record such incidents. There was no management activity plan for safety issues. The activity plan should serve as guidance to the SMT of the school with regard to safety.

#### **Observation regarding organising**

The arrangements at school A regarding safety are poor. It was difficult to see any evidence of organised procedures. I observed educators acting erratically. They reprimanded learners at random, without recording serious incidents. Organisation would be enhanced if the activity plan on safety is kept and displayed in the principal's office.

#### **Observation regarding leading**

There appears to be a lack of guidance or direction to lead the SMT in school A in terms of school safety. The principal is 'leading from behind'. The principal is the one who is supposed to assist the SMT with planning and preparation, and then provide leadership. The security guard does not carry out correct procedures at the gate, an indication that he requires direction by the safety officers at the school. This is the result of inadequate

leadership. Systematic events due to poor leadership can lead to accidents (Vincoli 1994, p. 13).

### **Observation regarding controlling**

I observed that the principal tries to manage the school by moving around to make sure that he is visible. Learners who are in groups are thus discouraged from committing any wrongdoing. However, the control instruments for handling misconduct are not well organised. Learners guilty of misconduct are recorded in a punishment book, but the code list as stated in the guidelines on How to Manage School Records, is not used to control learners. Misconduct is not rated according to the suggested levels. Disciplinary consequences as described in the code list are not indicated anywhere, such as level 1 which states that action to be taken may be a verbal warning, detentions, demerits, or menial tasks such as cleaning classrooms and extra work. These guidelines would help to control learners and reduce the risk of injury.

#### **(a) Toilets, gates and fencing**

I discovered that in school A they had to destroy an old toilet building because learners were hiding inside, smoking and holding gang meetings. The old toilet had been in a state of collapse, and some learners even tempted to sodomise others there. The school had to dig a new toilet indicated in figure 4.2.1. The debris of the old toilet can be seen in the distance. I tried to find out from the school principal why they have not put a cordon round the pit to avoid learners falling in. The principal's response was: *"We never thought about that, we have just warned them at the assembly and educators are also taking care of that, otherwise we are not experiencing any problem."*

**Figure 4.2.1: Dangerous pit, which is not covered**



In terms of gates and security, the school's lack of resources led to the failure by the School Management Team to employ a properly trained gate controller or security guards, as indicated in figure 4.2.2.

**Figure 4.2.2: Untrained gate controller**



Figure 4.2.2 confirms the finding that gate control is inadequate, which poses a serious threat to the safety of learners in school A. The response of one of the School Management Team was: *"The security guard at the gate does not have any weapon to deter criminals. The school does not have enough funds to employ trained security. The subsidy from the Provincial Department of Education is not enough, and a large amount of money is channeled into curriculum stationery, sport and transport."*

Access to the school is gained via two gates. One is a large double motor gate at the front entrance of the school, the other is a smaller single pedestrian gate sited at the rear of the school. This gate provides access to learners who live on the other side of the school. The fence around the perimeter looked very old and does not have razor wire running around the top. There are holes in the fence through which strangers can enter and some of the learners can sneak away when they are supposed to be in school. The school has not erected any safety signs such as “beware of danger”.

The school principal indicated that there are insufficient funds to erect proper fencing. The principal indicated that the School Governing Body is looking for a sponsor to augment their funds in order to erect strong palisade fencing. The principal did not show me the budget on how the School Governing Body prioritises their spending.

(b) Condition of doors and the buildings in general

I found that some burglar doors are about to fall off and pose a danger to learners as the hinges are detaching from the main frame. In some of the classrooms there were broken window panes which learners could use to injure each other. The roof structure of the older classrooms is very weak and could be blown away in a storm. I asked the principal what steps he has taken. The principal’s response was: *“I wrote several letters to the Limpopo Department of Education to come and renovate the school but no response was given. The School Governing Body drove to the office of the MEC for Education; they responded after a while by delivering four mobile classrooms but we are still waiting for renovation.”*

(c) Condition of common areas of the school grounds including playground, sports field, corridors etc.

The school ground was not well levelled. There are a lot of rocks lying around the school and next to some of the classrooms. The picture below shows evidence of the danger facing learners and teachers at school A.



**Figure 4.2.3: Rocks outside classrooms posing danger to safety of learners and educators**



Some learners loiter in corridors during the changeover between periods. I often observed unsupervised groups. Some of them smoke or conduct gang meetings. There is evidence of tobacco in the corridors and a heavy smell of smoke. Learners hang around, waiting in corners and on stairwells to trouble anyone who dares to pass through ‘their’ territory. This normally happens during the exchange of periods when teachers are on their way to the staff room or classroom. I observed that immediately when they see educators approaching, they disperse. I asked one of the SMT members why teachers do not control such groups. The response was: *“There is no plan to monitor learners during the exchange of periods; normally educators are interested in what is happening in their classrooms during the lesson.”*

The school sports ground is also used by the community. Learners are not safe because some of the community members can be aggressive.

(d) Presence of dangers such as sharp objects, broken chairs etc.

A dangerously neglected barbed wire fence encloses the school’s vegetable garden. Similar dangerous and neglected fencing has been erected in front of some classrooms and along certain corridors, presumably to deter learners from taking short cuts. There is another piece of barbed wire stored in the old library. I asked the principal why that barbed wire is not used. The response of the principal was: *“It is just there temporarily; we are still looking for somebody to use it. One of the educators was injured while looking for books.”* There is

no sign warning of danger. Unused window frames are also packed there. On the day of the observation visit, a major electrical cable was disconnected and exposed, posing a severe danger to all.

There is broken equipment such as desks and chairs littered in an open space and in unused classrooms, which some learners play with. These unused classrooms are not far from the main classroom area or the playground. They also contain various broken filing cabinets, laboratory chemicals, corrugated iron, broken garden tools, and other equipment. I asked one of the SMT members for how long those items are going to be stored there. The response was: *“A letter was written to the Provincial Department of Education to come and collect such items for recycling and we are still waiting for a response.”*

(e) General observations relating to school safety

I arrived at the school at 07h00. Learners arrived at school from various directions and entered the school by either of the two gates. The caretaker unlocked all the classrooms and left. Learners entered the gates unsupervised, and there were no educators supervising the classrooms. Some learners were seen hanging about in groups. When I peeped through a window I discovered that some of them were gambling. The first staff member to arrive was the principal. Other educators arrived and waited in their offices until lessons were due to start. The school bell rang at 07:45 and learners went to the assembly. About four educators assisted learners at the assembly.

**Figure 4.2.4: Unsupervised learners at the school gate**



After the assembly learners are expected to go to their classrooms, but some met in small groups after assembly. Some learners seemed to be older, and some of the older boys were wearing earrings. Learners tended to go to the toilet in large numbers immediately after assembly, without supervision. The majority of boys gathered behind the toilets, some smoking and others joking. The toilets of boys and girls are not far away from each other. Some small boys are scared to go inside the toilets because of threats by older boys. When they did go to their classroom, it was without educator supervision.

Learners have freedom of movement from one class to another without supervision. I asked the principal why the situation resembles that of a university. The response was: *“There is no plan for that; most of the educators are always engaged either marking or doing some administrative work and they cannot police and marshal learners in every movement.”* Community members use the gates of the school as a short cut to cross from one side to the other, which is not safe for learners. When I asked the principal about this, he was unable to explain the situation. I observed that there is a serious lack of supervision by educators.

(f) Break duty as indicated by a break duty roster

Learners were seen on their own around the playground during breaks. I asked the principal about the break duty roster, and the response was: *“Educators also go to break at the same time as learners; it is very difficult to implement it, there are educators who are doing it voluntarily without forcing them.”* Short break is 15 minutes and long break is 45 minutes. There was no proof of any plan for supervision during breaks. I observed learners playing alone. Some of the learners were throwing javelin in the absence of educators. Some learners go home during break, while others remain at school for the nutritional programme. Staff members made no effort to control or address learners’ behaviour during break. They also made no effort to control learners who left the school premises. I asked for the safety policy of the school, and it does not mention any regulations about break or learners who depart from the school. There is a need to review the policy.

(g) General behaviour and demeanour of learners on the playground

I observed that during break learners were playing soccer on the sports ground unsupervised. It was about 10am, when an argument broke out between learners, both in

grade 11, and they started fighting. One of the learners took a rod and hit the other with it on the head. The child collapsed and started bleeding, and was later taken to the clinic. The case was recorded in the school discipline book. The interaction of learners on the playground was too physical.

As indicated by the photo below, police were called when a fight broke out.

**Figure 4.2.5: Police vans in the school**



(h) Emergency equipment availability, suitability and condition

An emergency kit was found at the school, but there is no sick bay for a learner who happens to need emergency relief. Educators are not allowed to give learners any medication. No fire extinguishers or fire hose were visible anywhere on the outside of the school buildings. The principal indicated that they do not have enough funds to install fire extinguishers.

(i) Access control procedures

I observed no access control procedures at all. Learners and visitors passed through either of the two gates freely and at random. Security guards are not trained. The school cannot afford to hire trained security guards due to the lack of funds. There is no plan to institute searches of people entering the grounds.

(j) Office procedures for visitors to the school

Visitors seem infrequent and then enter and leave the school premises as they please, with no visitors' register or the like in evidence. The gate controller does not ask visitors their purpose in visiting the school. No routine procedures were observed during the observation visit. Some of the strangers go straight to the classrooms to meet learners, without permission from the office. Some visitors wait for a long time and come to the school for different reasons. The majority of young visitors arrive during break and mingle with learners. I observed some of the visitors leaving the school premises without being attended to by the school office.

(k) Office procedures for dealing with illness, injury occurrences and emergencies during the school day

Procedures are followed but not documented. I observed during one of the injury incidents that educators who give Life Orientation appear to be the ones in charge. Normally a child's parent is phoned, depending on the injury. If the injury is critical, the ambulance is phoned and an educator will accompany the learner to the clinic or hospital. However, no evidence was found of any written procedure for dealing with the occurrence of an injury or the illness of a learner.

(l) Procedure after school

I observed that sometimes learners struggle to pass through the small gate without supervision, as they rush to go home. None of learners are using public transport. I also observed strangers waiting at the gate for some learners. Some minor fights occurred after school.

The principal is the last person to vacate the school premises. When I asked him why he is the last to move out of the school premises, he said: *"There are learners who linger around the school without supervision, others are in groups and start gambling. I must make sure that everybody is out of the school gate before I go. After school, educators rush for their transport."*

The caretaker locks the classrooms but there are some learners who clean the classrooms after school, unsupervised. The night watchman resumes his duties when everybody has departed.

#### **4.2.2 Interview responses**

(a) How do you draft and formulate safety policies?

It was imperative for me to ascertain how schools draft and formulate safety policies. The respondents in school A said that: *“Various committees formed are responsible for the drafting of the safety policy. The draft will be forwarded to the different stakeholders starting with the staff members of the respective school. It must be the product of all stakeholders.”* One of the respondents from school A said: *“We usually just gather information here and there looking at our own circumstances at our own school.”* Another respondent in school A said: *“... the department must do something for us, because even the teachers are not safe, the learners are not safe. People can come to the school any time, they can hijack our cars and kill us.”*

School A has its own school safety policy which is kept in the principal’s office. I requested a copy of it. The principal identified the Schools Act as a source of information regarding the drafting and formulation of the school safety policy.

(b) How does the School Management Team implement school safety policies?

The principal indicated that portions of the policy are regularly read out to parents at parent meetings. He indicated that it is a big document and it is not easy to give all the parents a copy, due to the shortage of resources. Therefore copies of important aspects of the safety policy are given to parents to sign by way of acknowledgement. I found that school A faces a serious challenge on the implementation of safety policies.

A number of educators are no longer serious about safety measures at school, due to the lack of resources such as proper fencing, trained security personnel and gate control. One of the respondents in school A said: *“The main problem we are encountering is lack of resources. All the resources we are to use, we have to buy and we rely on Norms and Standards for finance. We do not have enough budgets. In school a safety committee is there*

*but fails to meet regularly. The activities of the safety committees are not indicated in the activity plan.”* When I asked the principal why this was the case, he indicated that they cannot congest the school activity plan with all the items because it would then not be easy to implement and monitor.

As a result, the school safety activity plan is not given priority. According to the SASA, the School Governing Body must form a safety committee to make sure that learners are safe. One of the respondents in school A indicated that most of the staff members are not interested in the meetings about safety measures at school.

(c) What are the common factors that lead to safety being compromised?

According to the principal, school A’s procedure for access to the school premises has been seriously undermined by the lack of funds for the School Management Team to employ proper trained gate controllers or security guards. Photos shown above confirm the findings that gate control is inadequate, which poses a serious threat to the safety of learners at school A. On the day of observation in school A, I did not find any evidence of gate control or searches. When parents come to fetch their children earlier, they are not required to fill in the time book.

In school A, when learners participate in school activities away from the school premises, their parents are not required to sign indemnity forms. This would be required as proof that parents have given permission for a child to participate, in case the child gets injured. School A’s safety policy does not provide concrete guidelines on how to deal with specific types of problem behaviour. The School Management Team restricts themselves to a single type of solution, and as a result, school safety is compromised. Furthermore, there is a lack of skills in terms of replacing unsuccessful techniques with new ones. There is also a lack of training in discipline techniques for teachers, or how to tighten control on problematic learners.

(d) How do you deal with carrying weapons to school?

I discovered that school A does not have proper procedures to deal with carrying weapons onto the school premises. The safety policy does, however, indicate that carrying weapons or harmful objects is illegal. The principal in school A remarked: *“Failure by the Department of Education to empower and train School Management Teams on safety issues, has led to*

*the failure by schools to formulate proper procedures on how to deal with such kind of issues on learners.”*

Due to the recurring problem of learners coming to school with illegal weapons, school A decided to engage a dog unit from the South African Police Services. Most of the learners were terrified as the police arrived unannounced, and the learners complained because they were not used to this type of activity. The police confiscated many knives, screwdrivers, marijuana and other undesirable items. Examples to confirm these findings are shown in the following figure.

**Figure 4.2.6: Weapons and drugs found on learners**



The principal in school A described stabbing, fighting, and stoning as frequent causes of injuries at school. When asked what solutions the staff have formulated, he said that they phone the police to come and assist.

(e) How do you deal with bullying?

The term ‘bullying’ refers to “the conscious violation of social norms by risk individuals across a range of settings” (Sprague & Walker, 2005, p. 78). I discovered that in school A there are some learners who exhibit antisocial behaviour such as fighting in the classroom, teasing other learners, or stealing lunch boxes of other learners. In school A, the duties of educators are strategically designed to show their presence in front of the toilets. Toilets are fenced to avoid learners hiding behind them to form gangs and groups.



In school A, over-age learners are frequent offenders in cases of bullying. The school recommends free and automatic transfer at the end of the year for over-age learners, but some parents are not comfortable with this. Each and every event is recorded by class teachers instead of reprimanding bullies verbally, although they are exposed and detained. The involvement of parents and the South African Police Services is vital in dealing with troublesome learners. The nearest police station has adopted school A to enhance the issue of safety.

(f) What is the role played by the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety?

I discovered that the role played by the RCL is very important in terms of safety issues. However, school A does not have the capacity to train learners for this role, nor is the department involved in the training of learners. Most of the incidents occurred in front of members of the RCL, but some of them are being threatened and silenced by bullies. There was an attempt by school A to train the RCL at the local municipal offices, but the training proved to be inadequate due to the lack of capacity by the facilitators. The information provided online was not even downloaded by other learners.

(g) Do you have rules for dealing with crisis issues, for example shooting, stabbing, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunch time duties?

I discovered that there is no proper procedure for handling crises in school A. The lack of departmental support in guiding the Motetema Circuit School Management Teams is a serious challenge. Even if the rules and regulations exist, they are not recorded in the schools. In school A, they tried to explain the procedures verbally, but without producing any written documentation. In other words, they resort to using their common sense.

(h) How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school?

In school A, learners with aggressive tendencies are identified at an early stage so that other learners can be protected from them. Educators also influence such learners to mend their ways. The support services are called in to offer therapeutic treatment. Educators who teach practical subjects are required to employ safety measures so that learners are not hurt or injured during the course of undertaking practical learning components. There is an

attempt in school A to draw up an emergency plan for action in dangerous situations such as fire, floods, etc.

(i) How do you monitor the safety of learners during strikes by educators?

It was imperative for me to ascertain how schools in the Motetema Circuit guarantee the safety of learners during any strike by educators. Respondents in school A indicated that the safety of learners during a strike is not guaranteed. Educators do not advise learners to stay away from school, they just disappear on strike. Neither are learners informed about when to return to school. Loyal learners who are eager to complete their studies went to school, especially those in grade 12. However, most of the classrooms were empty and it was not safe for learners. In school A, there was no plan at all to assist learners in such a situation. No member of the School Governing Body was delegated to assist learners. Some of the learners revealed that they were at risk of being raped. They indicated that there were strangers who tried to drag them away during break.

## **4.3 School B**

### **4.3.1 Observation results**

#### **Observation regarding planning**

Planning is a major challenge at school B. The fact that there is no team responsible for controlling the gates is an indication of poor planning. There is no lunch time duty roster. I observed that learners are on their own most of the time.

#### **Observation regarding organising**

The fact that learners are engaged in opening the gate for cars and strangers instead of being in the classroom shows that the SMT is disorganised. There is no structure to deal with safety issues.

#### **Observation regarding leading**

Vincoli (1994, p. 14) states that a truly safety-conscious manager will make sure his 'foreman' and 'workers' do as they are told, and "exercise his prerogative and obtain compliance... follow through and see that unsafe conditions are eliminated". He further

states that strict supervision, remedial training, and discipline should be enforced by leaders. In school B, such leadership in terms of safety is not visible.

### **Observation regarding controlling**

Vincoli (1994) claims that a lack of control by management starts a process that eventually results in safety incidents. Planning, organising, leading and controlling are very important in terms of ensuring safety in schools. In school B, control instruments to record incidents were not available. In several instances I observed learners in groups during break without any control.

#### **(a) Toilets, gates and fencing**

The school is fenced around the perimeter with barbed wire, although it is not very resistant. Access to the school premises is through one gate entrance, used by both pedestrians and cars. The fence at the front of the school is palisade fencing. The school is not at the centre of the village and the other side of the school faces the bush. In this school, toilets are well structured and do not pose any danger to learners.

**Figure 4.3.1: Better structured toilets**



There is no guard at the gate to control the movement of learners or strangers. Visitors are not recorded in any way. The photo overleaf shows that gate control is non-existent, which poses a serious threat to the safety of learners.

**Figure 4.3.2: Uncontrolled gate**



I observed in school B is that gates are always locked during the school day, even during the long break. Learners were always lingering around the gate. Sometimes they were requested to open gates for cars or people coming to visit the school since there was no gate controller. When a car approached the gate, learners scrambled to go outside, the moment the gate was opened for the visitors, which is dangerous and compromises the safety of learners. Some learners fell as they competed to move outside the school premises.

Furthermore I observed that although the gate is locked, planning, monitoring, controlling and leading in terms of gate control is very poor. The school hired a gate controller, but unfortunately he is engaged in other activities like picking up papers and some cleaning, and thus he is not on duty at the gate full time. It is therefore not easy to control outsiders from bringing foreign weapons into the school. There is a need to employ a full time gate controller who can be identified by a uniform to create order in terms of access to school B. It is difficult for educators to search learners as they need to prepare and present lessons.

(b) Condition of the doors and buildings in general

The school buildings were generally in good condition, with few broken windows or doors, although some classrooms are in need of a coat of paint. In some classes burglar doors are detaching from the main frame and could fall at any time. There is no plan in place for

maintenance of infrastructure. There are no signs to warn learners about this situation, which is very dangerous for learners when they walk from one class to another.

- (b) Condition of common areas of the school grounds including playground, sports field, corridors etc.

In school B there are no corridors, as there are in school A. The only problem I observed with the layout of the school is that there are blocks of classrooms behind other buildings. Learners need to move between various buildings during the school day, and without the supervision of educators, some of them can hide behind buildings. A new building block was being constructed on the day of observation. Learners moved near the construction site without any warning signs being in place. The new building is intended as a kitchen for the nutritional programmes.

The sports field was not well maintained, as there was litter and the steel of old desks was visible. The sport field is separated from the rest of the school grounds and is behind the classrooms. There is no gate to this area. Learners appeared to be playing alone, without supervision by educators. I asked one of the SMT members why learners were on their own, and she remarked: *“During Life Orientation or free periods, learners are given soccer balls while educators are busy with administrative work. Class monitors are in charge in the absence of educators.”*

- (d) Presence of dangers such as open holes, sharp objects, broken sports and/or playground equipment etc.

In school B, there is an area which is under construction. It is not cordoned off and is littered with building debris as old buildings are being demolished. Learners tend to use the area as they seek short cuts to the classrooms and other areas of the school. There are a lot of stones scattered around the school, but there are no open holes on the ground. Learners have free and unsupervised access to all the classrooms and the toilets, before school commences and during breaks. They could easily injure each other during a fight.

(e) General observations related to school safety

I arrived at the school at 7:30 and there was nobody controlling the gate. There was nobody controlling or assisting the learners in gaining access to the school. Educators were trying to control late comers from a distance. The gate was locked at 7:30. There were some learners who were locked outside where they remained without supervision.

(f) Break duty as indicated by a break duty roster

School B has no break duty roster. Learners move outside the school gate at will. One of the educators indicated that educators also need to relax and enjoy breaks. I discovered that a lot of activities take place during break time without any supervision by educators.

I made the following observations:

- Learners fight for soccer balls, throw stones at each other, wrestle with each other, and others gamble and smoke behind the classrooms.
- Girls are intimidated and silenced. Learners are often alone and are forced to defend themselves.
- Some learners from wealthy families are forced to pay money to get into toilets or to get protection from bullies and other older learners.

(g) General behaviour and demeanour of learners on the playground

Learner behaviour on the day of the observation was not good. Learners were not calm and were shouting at each other and whistling.

(h) Emergency equipment availability, suitability, condition

There was no sign of fire extinguishers. Observations were made in all classroom blocks. The school principal remarked that there is lack of funds to purchase fire extinguishers.

(i) Access control procedures

There were no access procedures in place on the day of the observations. Visitors to the school are not recorded anywhere. Learners are asked to go and open the gate for visitors. The gate is opened even if the visitor is unknown and some of the visitors do not even

report to the principal's office. There is no register for visitors – as a result, unknown visitors are not escorted or monitored.

Due to the fact that the school does not employ a formal security guard, there is no access control procedure continuously throughout the day. There is no clear sign at the gate which indicates to visitors what to do in order to gain entrance. There is no sign to indicate that the school is a drug, alcohol and dangerous weapons free zone. The school appeared to be unprepared for searching people wanting to gain access.

(j) Office procedures for visitors to the school

In school B, visitors are normally referred to the principal's office, and he then advises them where to go. There is no plan in written form. During the day of observation there were many visitors waiting to see the principal, but there was no visitors register. In some cases of a visitor wanting to see a learner, there is no confirmation as to whether the visitor is related to the learner.

(k) Office procedures for dealing with illness, injury occurrence and emergencies during the school day

In school B according to the school policy, staff may not dispense medication to a learner. The services of the paramedics are called upon in the event of an emergency. The clinic is not far from school B. If learners are not critically ill, they are given a release letter and can walk to the clinic.

(l) Procedure after school

I observed that there is only one gate at school B. Learners are unsupervised after school and they struggle to move out of the school premises, since pedestrians and cars use the same gate. Young learners are the ones who have the most difficulty. Some learners remain at school cleaning the classrooms, although this is unsupervised. The school does not employ cleaners because this item is unbudgeted – I checked the school budget. Educators leave as the school day finishes, and the principal remains in the office but does not supervise learners who are still on the premises.

### 4.3.2 Interview responses

(a) How do you draft and formulate safety policies?

Some of the respondents in school B indicated that drafting the safety policy at their school does not involve parents. The policy is discussed at a staff meeting and duly adopted. There is no room for any contribution from the School Governing Body or the Representative Council of Learners. Input is provided by educators only. Another respondent from school B said: *“We call the School Governing Body and they come with their views, then they will adopt, then we make sure that our policy is in line with departmental policy, because it does not operate in isolation.”* However, I discovered that there is a lack of guiding documentation from the Department of Education in terms of drafting and implementing school safety policy in order to deal with safety issues. I found that the School Management Team at school B lacks basic skills and knowledge when formulating safety policies.

(b) How does the School Management Team implement school safety policies?

I also found that the School Management Team in school B faces a serious challenge in implementing a school safety policy. A number of educators are no longer serious about safety measures, due to the lack of resources at the school, e.g. detectors, trained gate controllers, and fire extinguishers. Most staff members are not interested in forming safety committees or implementing safety measures at the school. There is an attempt by the principal to involve the SAPS, nurses, social welfare and emergency units when necessary.

(c) What are the common factors that lead to safety being compromised?

The Limpopo Department of Education does not allocate enough money, which has led to the School Management Team failing to employ properly trained gate controllers or security personnel. The safety policy in school B does not provide concrete guidelines on how to deal with specific problematic behaviour. Learners are not supervised during Life Orientation periods or during breaks – most of the time they are on their own. There is no plan to substitute for educators who are on leave or attending courses. As a result, unattended learners move from one class to another, or to the sports ground without supervision.



**Figure 4.3.3: Learners sitting outside without supervision**



Short, Short and Blanton (1994, p. 13) are of the opinion that teacher participation in planning and the implementation of safety plans is mandatory. More importantly, the teacher provides a critical variable in the total school effort through development and utilisation of problem-solving skills. Students should know what the school expects of them and what the consequences will be if they do not meet these expectations. Short et al. (1994) claim that most students will fall in line with expectations.

I found that in school B, the code of conduct is silent about learners moving from one class to another class during lesson changes. Safety is compromised because they are not aware of the school's expectations. Students are surprised when they are reprimanded. There is no advocacy around the school in terms of safety measures. There are no awareness campaigns. The code of conduct for learners is not accessible, neither do learners know what is expected of them, since most of the policies are filed in the principal's office.

In school B I observed that some learners sell items such as sweets and cakes. The school does not approve of this, but learners do it on their own initiative. This poses a threat to school safety, since I found some learners fighting for such items. Some of them are tempted to steal and promise to pay later, only to fail to honour their agreements. This results in assaulting each other and demanding money. The school has no policy to control

such activity. Such a lack of adequate policies and procedures leads to theft and an increase in fighting amongst students.

Furthermore safety is compromised in school B due to disputes over cell phones and other valuable items. There is no policy to control cell phone use and stop thefts and fights. My suggestion is that school B should draft a cell phone use policy so that children can use cell phones positively.

One of the educators in school B indicated that some learners are suffering from severe stress. They try to communicate it through creating disturbances and attempting to gain attention by means of acts of aggression. As a result they become a threat to school safety. Ingrid (2009, p. 98) claims that acts of revenge restore a sense of power to the individuals who experience victimisation, providing “reparation to the wounded and hidden parts of the self”.

In one incident in school B, a pupil stabbed another in one of the classrooms during break. The two boys were fighting over a hat. The victim was bleeding seriously in the area around the ribs. An ambulance was phoned and arrived immediately. First aid was given to the boy. The parents of the stabbed boy were called to come in to the school. The police arrived and followed the child to the hospital. The culprit was suspended for a week.

I discovered that there is no injury policy at the school. That is why the parents were called even before the child was sent to the hospital. However, the school policy does clearly indicate that no weapons should be brought to school. The learner undermined the school policy and smuggled a knife into school. This was possible as a result of the lack of searching procedures at the gate or the presence of trained security personnel. I thus conclude that safety at this school is still a big challenge and even the lives of educators are in danger. Some educators blamed the Department of Education, and not the principal. One educator remarked: *“The Department is failing to support us in implementing safety policies in schools. Schools use different safety policies and are unguided.”*

The safety officer in school B, who is also a member of the SMT, said: *“The School Management Team in our school tries to communicate with other schools; unfortunately all of us are blind and hence safety policies at our schools are compromised. Schools are*

*formulating and drafting school safety policies out of their common sense. In terms of curriculum issues, schools are networking and are well connected and School Management Teams can even share knowledge and ideas through meetings. When it comes to safety issues, it is totally different. There is no co-ordination at the circuit level".* I did not discover whether or not the circuit office is aware of this need.

The above mentioned statements provide evidence that networking among schools does not bear fruit, as schools are struggling to maintain order and ensure that the safety of learners is protected. Some respondents remarked that institutions cannot work in isolation in terms of communication, planning and common problem solving skills. Neighbouring schools in the same community need to cooperate on safety issues, otherwise learners take advantage and start to rule themselves. School B tried to tighten safety measures, but there was an exodus of learners who moved to schools where they had more freedom of movement. Some schools tend to relax their safety policies and control in order to attract more pupils, as a way of protecting their staff allocation. There is no common approach or guidelines provided to schools on this issue by the Department of Education.

(d) How do you deal with carrying weapons to school?

School B does not have a procedure to search individuals. Some parents threaten to open a case if their children are searched. The activity plan of the school and the code of conduct do not indicate that there may be any searches by the police.

In school B staff indicated that they confiscate dangerous weapons the moment they are alerted. They record the name of the offender in the punishment book. The learner is sent home and required to return with their parents. If the learner is second offender, he or she is suspended for a week. In this particular school, it is difficult for them to go beyond the suspension of a learner, but in some serious cases, they do involve the police. The police are also given a timeslot during assembly as part of an awareness campaign, which includes awards presentation ceremonies for good behaviour. This is done to deter learners from bringing weapons to school. In school B, there are instance where educators apply corporal punishment to create order, even if this is against the law. I asked the principal whether he is aware that corporal punishment has been abolished. He replied that such incidents occur without his permission.

(a) How do you deal with bullying?

In school B educators punish learners by having them do cleaning and frog jumping in front of other learners to make an example of them. There have been some instances in which educators become emotional and harass the learners, without any institutional support. In school B there was no evidence of any policy regarding bullying. The principal remarked that the school struggles with this issue because there are no guidelines from the Department of Education. He indicated that it is difficult to eradicate bullying completely, but it is under control in his school.

I discovered that several schools around the Motetema Circuit are struggling to deal with bullying. There is a lack of reporting procedures, grievance procedures, training programmes for administrators and staff, and little interest from parents. In school B, most of the cases of bullying are handled by male educators rather than female educators. One of them remarked: *“Classroom policies are there in school to make sure that there is order in the classroom.”* I borrowed a copy of this policy and found out that most of the items listed resemble those described in the school code of conduct. I concluded that schools are using various forms and means to deal with bullying, as there are no proper guidelines from the Department of Education on this issue.

(f) What is the role of the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety?

I discovered that in school B, the role played by the RCL in terms of safety issues is minimal. However, they are involved in various sub-committees dealing with safety and are represented as stakeholders during the drafting and formulation of safety policies.

Members of the RCL create order when learners collect food from the kitchen. They are the eyes of educators during sports activities. The problem is that learners cannot create order on their own, since they tend to undermine each other. There is no respect for the RCL and they cannot guarantee the safety of learners. It is always the responsibility of educators to make sure that learners are safe. Therefore the role of the RCL in terms of school safety in school B is minimal.

(g) Do you have rules for dealing with shooting, stabbing, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunch time duties?

No proper procedure was available in school B. The principal indicated: *“We use a situational approach in all incidences at school. There is a lack of safety officers at the circuit level to guide schools in terms of the safety measures in a serious note. Rules are explained verbally by the deputy manager of governance. Monitoring teams coming to schools from the circuit during re-opening always focus on curriculum issues, an incident occurred during in-coming soccer match by the school, a child was gunned down by another learner. Everybody was confused as there was no plan about such unforeseen circumstances. The only thing we could do was to phone the police.”*

There are no lunch time duties for educators, most of whom go for a lunch break outside the school premises. The principal does not have control over the educators during break. The Department of Education in Limpopo needs to conduct workshops with educators on the issues raised above.

All three schools under study use the same procedure in case of crises, namely phoning the ambulance, the police and the parents of the victim. The culprit will be called into the office and reprimanded. In most cases the culprit is sent home to return again with his parents. Most of the schools under study, including school B, have implemented this common sense approach. No procedures are listed for unforeseen circumstances

(h) How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school?

In school B, educators have record books to log all incidents regarding learners' safety. They indicated that these record books are checked by the safety committee to investigate the frequency of events and which learners may be repeat offenders. They then involve the parents, where necessary. Staff also regularly visit the toilets to monitor learners' safety there. In school B, they make sure that all learners are out of the school gate before the School Management Team departs, because they cannot leave learners alone in the school. The safety committee is headed by a member of the School Management Team who reports to the school management meetings.

Medication is administered where learners complain of headaches or nausea. Learners with specific medical needs are not given proper attention. This is evident because the school does not keep a register of learners who require regular medication. The principal uses his car to transport learners in case there is a crisis. In school B one learner collapsed and she was kept in one of the offices as there is no sick bay. The area did not have enough ventilation.

When a school excursion occurs, learners are accompanied by educators and members of the School Governing Body. The bus must have a roadworthy certificate and up-to-date service certificates. Learners must be collected by parents after such trips. The deputy principal is required to go on the excursion to ensure that he monitors learners' safety.

On the issue of playground duty and the use of a playground duty roster for educators, the principal was vague and his answers were unsatisfactory. He did, however, state emphatically that the school has no need to deploy educators on the playground, when their role is teaching in the classroom.

(i) How do you monitor the safety of learners during strikes by educators?

It was important to ascertain the safety of learners during any strike by educators. The respondents in school B indicated that during a strike, no educator is expected to be at school, since non-striking educators are always intimidated by those on strike. I discovered that in school B, all educators belong to one union, including the principal, who is an active member. As a result, the safety of learners in school B during a strike is not guaranteed.

I observed that educators did not inform learners not to come to school during a strike – they simply disappeared. It was not like when the school is officially closed, when learners are informed as to when to return to school. Some learners were tempted to go to school in the absence of educators and study in empty classrooms, which was dangerous. In school B, it was reported by passers-by that there were some incidents of fighting amongst learners, due to the lack of control in the absence of educators.

## **4.4 School C**

### **4.4.1 Observation Results**

#### **Observation regarding planning**

Compared to schools A and B, planning in school C is at an advanced stage and the SMT is more actively involved. The fact that educators are clustered in blocks to monitor safety is a good plan, as is the fact that class teachers have record books for misconduct. However, I observed that the plan is not well implemented by most of the educators in the classroom. The school Register of Misconduct provides an overall picture of all disciplinary measures instituted by the school.

#### **Observation regarding organising**

The deputy principal seemed to be active in organising the safety team at school. I observed that although the security guard is not always at the gate, the majority of learners are well cared for in their classrooms. There were containers of water in the classroom to prevent learners from going to the tap too often. Keeping learners in the classroom requires good organisational skills. In schools A and B there were many learners outside the classrooms during the time of observation.

#### **Observation regarding leading**

Although learners entered the gate without supervision in the morning, the principal is seen taking a leading role by moving from one class to another to assemble learners. Not all educators were on duty during the first period, as evidenced by noise in the classrooms. The principal does not spend much time in the office, as he manages by moving around. This will obviously reduce the risk of injuries at school C.

#### **Observation regarding controlling**

There is a file recording safety incidents in the principal's office, which I witnessed during the day of observation. I observed three parents arriving, and when I asked the principal about it, he said that they were called due to the misconduct of their children who started a group fight. This level of control enhances safety at school C. There is still room for

improvement, as records of individual cases need to be developed, and levels of misconduct and appropriate punishment need to be implemented to promote safety.

(a) Toilets, gates and fencing

The perimeter of school C is fenced with palisade fencing about two metres high. There is no barbed wire around the fence which is in good condition, and prevents people from gaining access to the school. Legal access is gained via one gate which is opened at 6:30. There is no pedestrian gate. During the time of observation the gate was closed at 15:30. The principal was the last person to depart from the school.

**Figure 4.4.1 Controlled gate**



(b) Condition of doors, windows and the buildings in general

School C consists of two separate enclosures: the playground and the classrooms. A new block of classrooms was being constructed during my visit to the school. A sign was displayed warning of the need for caution due to the renovation of classrooms.

I observed very few broken or missing windows; however, many of the classroom doors were found to be generally in a state of disrepair with missing locks and/or door handles. Some burglar doors were detaching from the main frame. Half of the window panes are painted.



- (c) Condition of common areas of the school grounds including playground, sports fields, corridors, learner bathrooms, school kitchen etc.

**Figure 4.4.2: Corridors where learners can hide**



The grounds of school C are fenced off. The grounds were generally neat and litter-free on the day of the observation, but there was a lot of dust. There is no grass covering the playground. It is very difficult to play during dusty conditions or windy weather. No sports facilities were visible. The school kitchen was just a small room. Class monitors collect food during break, amongst stiff competition. Some learners eat in groups outside the classrooms. They move freely from class to class without supervision by educators.

There are two blocks of toilets, one for males and one for females. There is a sign about maintenance of the toilets, although I observed that they are not regularly cleaned and the area is becoming unhygienic. When learners go to the toilets there is no supervision. The facilities appear to be a danger. I observed that is a pit toilet and does not use water for flushing. I asked the principal whether there is any plan to maintain the toilets. He said: *“Learners are punished and clean the toilets, but some of the learners refused; we do not have money to hire regular cleaners”*, so it is not easy to keep them clean.

- (d) Presence of dangers such as open manhole covers, sharp objects, broken sports and/or playground equipment etc.

On the day of observation, the lawn was unkempt and untidy. Some learners who were being punished were trying to cut the grass. Old steel desks and chairs were piled at the corner of the school premises which was not cordoned off. Some learners were playing with them. The playgrounds are not covered with green grass and no playground equipment was visible. Electricity is distributed from the main office of the principal, and the distribution box is securely locked.

(e) General observations relating to school safety

At 7:30 the gate was opened and learners entered without supervision. Grade 12 learners are the first to arrive at school for morning studies. I encountered five educators on the premises on my arrival. Before the commencement of the school day learners can move from one class to another without supervision. The bell rang at 7:45 for assembly. The principal dismissed learners to their classrooms and educators were in the staff room. There was a lot of noise and pushing of desks. The majority of learners go to the toilets immediately after assembly. Some educators control late arrivals. A lot of learners were doing frog jumping as a means of punishment. Some learners were sent home without any supervision. I discovered that they can be attacked going home alone.

(f) Break duty as indicated by the break duty roster

During the day of observation the principal and other staff members indicated that there is no break duty roster. Learners are given soccer balls to practise and are always on their own during break. Some of the educators go outside the school premises during break. Some learners participate in nutritional programmes at school and there was supervision by their class teachers when food was distributed. Some of the learners stood around in groups playing music from their cell phones.

Due to the lack of a break duty roster in school C, I observed that one particular learner was under the influence of liquor. He started making trouble in the classroom, threatening other learners. He disturbed the whole class in the absence of educators. He went behind the toilets, throwing stones at other learners and swearing about educators in front of the others. He was asked to go home and call his parents.

(g) General behaviour and demeanor of learners on the playground

The learner behaviour on the playground was found to be generally good; however there was noisy music from cell phones. Most of the learners stood about in groups. Some were playing netball and others were just spectators. Small boys ran after each other. There were some signs of gambling in another group of learners, but when I tried to approach them, they dispersed. There were some learners at a deserted spot on the grounds and I concluded that without proper supervision, they could abuse each other.

(h) Emergency equipment – availability, suitability conditions

No emergency equipment was visible in any outside area of the school. There was no sign of fire extinguishers. I asked the principal about this, and he indicated that they do not have enough funds to purchase fire extinguishers, and they are not necessary.

(i) Access control procedures

The school has no formal access procedures. I observed cars coming in and out without any recording. Learners open the gate for visitors. There is no school visitors' register. The school employed no formal security guard at the time of the observation visit. There are times where the SAPS visit to the school to investigate any safety problems.

(j) Office procedures for visitors to the school

The school has a double-storey office block, with the office of the principal on the second floor. All visitors who came to the school were given directions to the deputy principal's office, but there is no book to record people visiting the offices. Once visitors had gained access using the informal procedure, some of them stood with learners without permission. They were easily identified because they were not wearing school uniform. Some of the visitors were reprimanded by the school principal and ran away.

(k) Office procedures for dealing with illness, injury and emergencies during the school day

There is a clinic further along the tar road. Learners in school C are not allowed to go to the clinic without a letter about their purpose. Some of the learners go to the clinic on their own

without the assistance of class teachers, although if they are in a serious condition they are accompanied by educators. An ambulance may be called in some instances. During the day of observation, no learner was injured.

(l) Procedure after school

Learners come from surrounding villages and do not need to use public transport. There is a lot of mingling of learners after school without supervision. There is only one gate for cars and pedestrians. Sometimes learners struggle to move out of the gate, although I did not observe any stampede. One of the educators indicated that sometimes there are fights after school amongst groups of boys. There is a caretaker who controls learners when sweeping after school. Educators were not around after the end of lessons.

#### 4.4.2 Interview responses

(a) How do you draft and formulate safety policies?

In school C there is an attempt to involve all educators when the safety policy is drafted. One of the educators who is a member of the SMT said: *“Educators are involved through heads of the department. The involvement of the learner representative council is minimal. The community also influences the drafting of the safety policy. Most of the suggestions come as a complaint during parents’ meetings. Then the policy will be drafted out of that. The role played by the School Governing Body is not so significant due to the fact that they do not take interest in the education of their children. Most of the suggestions come from educators.”*

When I asked why the SGB was not given a chance to set and draft the policy, the principal said: *“The majority of them are not interested in formulating policies; we formulate, they adopt.”* The School Management Team at school C does not receive any training in handling safety measures. There is also an indication that there is a lack of information in the schools under study. I concluded that the Department of Education is failing to collate and disseminate information pertaining to the drafting and formulation of safety policies at schools.

(b) How does the School Management Team implement school safety policies?

In school C a positive sign is that most of the educators are involved in safety issues through heads of department. I learnt that some educators are in charge around the campus, discouraging learners who sit in lonely spots; their names are taken and they are questioned. Others supervise specific grades. All educators take charge around the school. Learners are discouraged from going to the toilets frequently. They are reprimanded if they go to the toilets alone without permission, and their names are recorded. Male educators take turns in supervising the boys' toilets to avert any form of injury which might occur there. In the morning educators make sure that all learners are in the classroom. There is an attempt by the school to engage SAPS, nurses and emergency units and their contact numbers are displayed in the principal's office.

(c) What are the common factors that lead to safety being compromised?

The principal at school C said: *"The main factor detracting from the safety of the learners at the school is lack of funds. With enough money the school would be able to replace or at least repair the dilapidated fence and also employ security guards to exercise access control and to look after the premises at night, when most vandalism and theft occurs. There is also a need for an alarm system to deter burglars. Safety is compromised at school because of educators who are not sensitive to students' needs. Learners decide to control or do things in their own way"*.

Furthermore the safety policy at school C does not provide concrete guidelines on how to deal with specific types of problem behaviour. Punishment given to learners is mostly the same, learners are used to it and it no longer has an impact. Learners are sometimes on their own in groups, without supervision by educators.

Safety at school C is compromised by learners suffering from severe stress. They try to communicate it through disturbances and attempts to gain attention through acts of aggression. As a result they become a threat to school safety.

(d) How do you deal with carrying weapons to school?

In school C there is no plan to search learners, and unlike in school A, the police are never involved in searching learners. There is a need for the Department of Education to conduct workshops in school C, to make sure they draft and formulate policies which can assist them in dealing with carrying weapons to school.

Although there is an attempt to form a safety committee in school C, the problem is the lack of direction and documentation from the Department of Education. Therefore it is not easy for the SMT to deal with carrying weapons to school. Incidents are occurring due to lack of proper policy to deal with this issue.

School C has stopped conducting farewell functions due to security issues. Some learners take the chance to smuggle beer and dangerous weapons onto the premises, due to a lack of proper procedures at the gate. Outsiders can also come and mix with learners. In 1998 a child was shot dead during a farewell function. The fight started outside the premises, then came into the school grounds. The learners involved were fighting about shoes. This evidence confirms that it is difficult for school C to deal with the issue of carrying weapons to school.

(e) How do you deal with bullying?

There is a disciplinary committee and incidents are reported to the senior teachers. Learners are not allowed to disguise themselves or cover their faces. Dreadlocks for boys and earrings are not allowed. In school C all class teachers have punishment books to record minor cases and troublesome learners. Some incidents of bullying have been reported during nutritional programmes. The Department of Education in Limpopo has introduced nutritional programmes to help learners participate optimally at school.

There is lack of monitoring by educators during the break when learners are served food. This is when bullies fight and scramble for food in the absence of educators. School C has better plans which are implemented in a better way than either school A or school B. Sometimes educators are there when learners collect buckets of food. One respondent remarked: *"This is an additional responsibility; it is not part of my job description. I am also entitled to go on a break; parents must come and monitor their children during lunch time."*

(f) What is the role played by the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety?

School C has always had contact with the SAPS. Debating competitions have been conducted to raise safety awareness. Members of the RLC were elected as ambassadors of safety to help with awareness programmes. School C has established 'suggestion boxes' in strategic places in the school for learners to be able to write a letter reporting a specific incident. The boxes are accessible to learners who can deposit a letter without everyone watching them. These suggestion boxes are also used to report positive incidents that take place in the school. The school safety officer, together with members of RCL, is responsible for emptying the suggestion boxes. The RCL also has incident report book.

(g) Do you have rules for dealing with crisis issues, for example shooting, stabbing, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunchtime duties?

In school C there is no formal policy to deal with issues mentioned above. One of the respondents in school C said: *"Normally, these policies are being implemented randomly, and they are not effective. There is also a lack of cooperation from other educators, especially in the morning and afternoon."* I discovered that there is lack of cooperation in terms of safety measures and their implementation in the school. Some of the educators attempt to handle crisis issues on a voluntary basis, without proper guidelines.

Furthermore, educators in school C have different beliefs in terms of learner discipline, as well as identifying problem behaviour and choosing strategies to deal with it. They use control techniques such as punishment and suspensions. In critical situations, ambulances or the SAPS are called.

(h) How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school?

In school C there are monitoring groups to ensure the safety of learners at school. Educators are grouped into blocks and led by members of the School Management Team. The programme is designed so that it complements normal schooling duties and activities. School safety is integrated into the daily activities of the school and contributes to the development of the school community. Although the monitoring plan does not provide detailed guidelines in terms of how to implement it, at least educators are seen to be involved.

Learners are discouraged from standing around in groups or loitering in corridors or behind classrooms. The principal manages by walking around the campus. There is a tendency amongst learners, when they play soccer during break, or in a free period in the absence of teachers, to take bets using money. I observed fighting at 10:00 and some learners in the group started gambling. Suspicious learners are sent to the principal's office for questioning, and if found guilty, correct procedures are followed. During formal staff meetings the safety committee gives its report. The staff can then evaluate whether the monitoring efforts by safety officers are reaping rewards and how challenges may be overcome. There are also regular visits by staff to the toilets. After school, educators make sure that all learners are outside the school gate. No learner is allowed to remain at school without monitoring.

(i) How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school during a teacher's strike?

I found that there is no plan in school C for monitoring learners during a strike. The majority of learners decide to stay at home for their own safety. Only Grade 12 learners attempted to go to school. Although the School Governing Body volunteered to monitor them, it was not easy in the absence of educators. During a strike, learners were on their own most of the time. Some of them resorted to playing games to while away the time, due to the lack of supervision.

It is not easy for the school to handle a strike situation. No educator can come and assist them due to fear of intimidation. Some of the learners come to school without wearing the proper uniform. Some of them tempted to gamble or flirt with each other, and fighting broke out. This was revealed to me by members of the LRC who were present during a strike.

## **4.5 Document analysis**

### **4.5.1 School A**

An analysis of the discipline book in school A revealed the following cases committed by learners from 2004 to 2010. In some cases the discipline book does not record the nature of the case; it just says 'misbehaviour'. Some learners in Grade 8 brought screwdrivers into the classroom and were caught unscrewing tables. This is an indication that there is a shortage of furniture, and learners tend to fight for it. Some learners were reprimanded for swearing



at educators and threatening to fight with them, especially female educators. Their names are recorded in the punishment book by the principal. Parents are often called when a learner misbehaves.

I discovered that learners who regularly cause fights in the classrooms, tend to display deteriorating performance. Incidences were recorded of learners assaulting each other in front of educators. One child was stabbed outside the school gate after school, and the case was reported in the punishment book. A fight started in the toilets where learners were smoking. Some learners were punished for bringing pornographic material into the classroom. In other cases, there was serious disorder in the classroom.

In school A there are a lot of unused and broken chairs and bricks, which compromise the safety of learners. They use these objects to fight, as was recorded in the punishment book. Some learners who caused a fight jumped the fence and ran away before their cases were solved. I discovered that some learners bring spray substances into classroom and spray others, disturbing their vision. This case was recorded and the culprits were reprimanded.

Some children took photographs while an educator was teaching. The educator felt unsafe because he did not know what would happen next. Some learners threw stones at others when praying at the assembly. A female learner who was pregnant was seriously disturbed as other learners were fighting and pushing desks in class. Learners fight for the control of food in the absence of educators. Some learners smuggle beer onto the school premises.

After reprimanding learners, there is nothing much that educators in school A can do, since the School Governing Body does not have the legal capacity to suspend learners. Some of the parents come to school trying to challenge decisions taken by the disciplinary committee and even threaten them.

Through this document analysis, I discovered that due to the lack of proper guidelines in terms of safety at schools, the School Management Team in school A uses different means to deal with cases at school level. The way cases are recorded shows that different procedures are used for dealing with misdemeanors. The safety policy document in school A is a very short document, written only in point form. It highlights the control of gates and

behaviour of learners, but there is no procedure for dealing with particular cases, nor are there any signatures of stakeholders.

#### **4.5.2 School B**

I also studied and analysed the safety policy in school B. The policy is well framed but lacks aims and objectives for example, due to the fact that it is a product of the school, and not directed at departmental level.

Here is an extract from the safety policy in school B:

##### ***“Prevention of Accidents***

*In order to avoid accidents at school, the following must be done:*

- (a) No dangerous objects must be kept in classrooms.*
- (b) Furniture in the classroom must be arranged in such a manner that learners and educators do not get injured by bumping into it.*
- (c) No poisonous or inflammable substances must be kept in the classroom.*
- (d) The school yard must be kept free of stones and sharp objects.”*

The policy should outline how learners are required to behave in the toilets, in the school grounds, on the road in the vicinity of the school, when they are being transported, during sports activities, and the handling of fractures and poisons. There are no signatures at the end of the policy document to make it authentic. The approach is totally different from that in other schools, due to the lack of proper guidelines from the Department of Education.

School B makes no proper record of cases which occur at school – there is no punishment book as in school A. The principal indicated that class teachers keep such records, but I did not manage to see any record book of misbehaviour. Some cases are recorded in a log book. Safety is compromised since there is no proper central record of incidents committed by learners. It is therefore not easy to discourage bullying and other forms of misbehaviour.

### **4.5.3 School C**

I also studied the safety policy at school C. It indicates that the school yard should be kept clean and free of dangerous objects such as loose stones and pieces of glass. The policy states that learners are not allowed to move out of the school premises before the school day is over. It indicates that dangerous games are not permitted, and that junior and senior learners must not play in the same place. Rose trees must not be planted in the vicinity where junior learners play, since they could be pricked by thorns while running about.

The school C policy states that learners may not disguise themselves with hats or any other garment. Learners are expected to wear the proper school uniform for easy identification. Class teachers keep a record book of learners who misbehave. Parents are called and sign as evidence that they are involved. Some learners have been suspended due to ill discipline. There is also a central book to record serious incidences which take place at school. It shows that the police sometimes visit the school.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

Most of the information gathered during observation and interviews vividly supports the fact that much needs to be done by the Department of Education to support, train and mentor School Management Teams in terms of safety at schools. The evidence provided by educators and the School Management Teams in the three schools under study, shows that there is a lack of support from the department and the surrounding communities. Such challenges need to be closely scrutinised and new strategies or mechanisms need to be put in place in order to ensure the success of formulation and implementation of safety policies in schools in the Motetema Circuit.

The main research question remains: “What are the challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of school safety issues?” The next chapter attends to the question by summarising the data collected and making recommendations. This might help to address the prevailing challenges or problems of support to School Management Teams by the circuit office and the Department of Education.

## **Chapter 5 Discussion, Conclusions and Recommendations**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the main findings from the data analysis stage. The findings helped me to construct a collective knowledge base on the challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of safety issues. A summary of the findings and their implications for challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of safety matters is presented. The main aim of the summary of findings is to establish the ground for the recommendations of the study.

This chapter, thus, analyses the findings of the data collected during the course of the study. It also highlights suggestions made by the School Management Teams. The conclusion serves as a closing synopsis of the dissertation.

### **5.2 Responding to questions**

The data was collected and analysed on the basis of the research questions, and the gaps identified in the literature review. This was done in order to break up the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and areas for analysis (Mouton, 2001, p. 108). The data was analysed in the context of the main research question: *What are the challenges faced by School Management Teams (SMTs) in terms of school safety issues in the Motetema Circuit?*

#### **5.2.1 Question number 1: How do schools draft and formulate safety policies?**

I found that most schools are drafting safety policies without having a baseline from the Department of Education. Schools take into account their local environmental contextual factors. They are compelled to formulate such policies because it is not possible to teach and learn in an environment that is disorderly, disruptive or unsafe, according to Squelch (2000, p. 17). Creating and maintaining a safe, disciplined school environment is one of the most important challenges faced by School Management Teams in the Motetema Circuit. Serious challenges were identified in terms of planning, implementing, monitoring and leading in terms of safety policies in all three schools under study.

The Department of Education formulated new regulations for discipline and punishment in schools, without providing or suggesting new disciplinary measures to School Management Teams. As a result, schools in the Motetema Circuit are formulating safety policies in different ways. Some are trying to involve parents, others are using sub-committees, and yet others are still not very clear about what to do. This is as a result of the lack of ongoing support from the Department of Education.

The legal basis for the development of a code of conduct is Section 8 of the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (Republic of South Africa, 1996b) which states that, subject to any applicable provincial laws, the governing body of a public school must adopt a code of conduct after consultation with learners, parents and educators (Squelch, 2000, p. 17) However, School Management Teams are unable to follow the process, due to a lack of workshops and capacity building. Squelch (2000) lists the following steps which should be taken when a policy is drafted: awareness raising, information gathering and consultation, drafting the code of conduct, revising, implementation and review. However, the School Management Teams under study remain in the dark concerning such aspects. District offices need to play their part, such as conducting workshops to empower School Management Teams in the Motetema Circuit.

### **5.2.2 Question number 2: How do School Management Teams implement and value school safety policies?**

In investigating safety at schools, my observations and the interview responses reveal that there is an attempt by School Management Teams to implement safety policies at school, but they lack support from staff members and the Department of Education. The lack of resources, such as qualified security personnel, also poses a problem to most of the schools. Some of the educators are not committed to safety issues at school, due to their different philosophies in terms of discipline. Schools struggle to implement safety policies properly since they do not have clear guidelines in terms of searching procedures. They revealed that they lack high-end architectural design, metal detectors, well-monitored gates, strong fences, and video cameras. However, schools are trying in other ways to control access and to minimise illegal entrants to school premises. Sprague and Walker (2005, p. 40) suggest that the following items should be considered when implementing safety policies in schools:

- Closed campus. All school gates should be locked during school hours.
- Security cameras. Strategically placed cameras can be deterrents by themselves and assist in identifying intruders.
- Volunteers or campus supervisors. Volunteers can assist in building supervision before school and during lunch, patrolling grounds and talking to learners.
- Staff and visitor identification badges. Visitors, staff and substitutes should be asked to check in at the office and wear identifying badges.
- Child study teams. Building administrators, school psychologists, councillors and others should meet together regularly to review the adjustment status of students in the school.
- Confidential reporting system. The school should make available to learners, parents and staff, a confidential reporting system through which potential incidents that occur during school or non-school hours can be reported.
- School resource officers. Increase the use of either public safety officers or community safety personnel to supervise students, provide training, or intervene in conflicts or illegal activities.

The poor financial capacity of the schools in this study means that they cannot afford to implement most of the above-mentioned solutions. All the respondents revealed that they are concentrating on locking the gates. However, they prefer to abide by programmes backed or supported by the Department of Education, and the Department is letting them down. As a result, most educators do not value safety measures at school. Where the Department of Education is not visible, educators relax, thus compromising safety at school.

### **5.2.3 Question number 3: What are the common factors that lead to safety being compromised?**

I found that the safety of learners is compromised at school due to the lack of monitoring by the School Management Teams and educators. It frequently happens that learners are on their own. Due to the lack of staffing in schools, it is difficult to replace an absent educator, hence learners are left unsupervised.

When educators are not supported enough it is very difficult to diagnose learners with unsafe attitudes and beliefs, or patterns of anti-social or dangerous behaviour. Most of the educators indicated that they are overloaded and always busy with paperwork or arranging portfolios, due to the outcomes-based education (OBE) system. There is no time to monitor safety at school, and in particular, unidentified visitors can gain access to the school premises. None of the schools where the research was conducted make use of identification badges.

I discovered that there is a serious lack of community or parental involvement in terms of safety at schools in the Motetema Circuit. Sprague and Walker (2005) recommend four strategies for facilitating parental involvement in making schools safer:

- Create a parent advisory group devoted to school safety issues.
- Advocate that parents should teach their children adaptive, non-violent methods of responding to bullying, teasing and harassment at school, and to encourage them to avoid fighting back.
- Advocate secure handling of weapons at home and for gun safety instruction for all family members.
- Make available to parents solid information on effective parenting practices and provide access to parent training classes to those who seek additional guidance and support in their efforts to parent more effectively (Sprague & Walker, 2005, p. 25-26).

This research study revealed that School Management Teams in the Motetema Circuit are struggling to find ways of involving parents effectively in terms of safety issues at school. Programmes designed for safety at school tend to revolve around educators alone, and exclude parents, thus compromising the safety of learners. To make matters worse, the Department of Education, circuit and district offices do not offer effective assistance.

Furthermore there are no monitoring plans during break time. Educators claim that they must also go for a break. In some schools learners are given soccer balls during break and being unsupervised, they start to fight and hurt each other. In some of the schools, learners hide in corridors which are not closed off, smoking and hurting each other. Dangerous areas are not cordoned off. In one of the schools, a trench was dug and there was no sign warning

of danger – learners could run towards the trench and push each other. Such situations all contribute to compromising the safety of learners at school.

When gates are opened during break or after school, there is no proper supervision. Learners rush to exit the premises and some of them collapse as they compete with others to move through the gates. During the school day, the gates are sometimes opened by learners who undermine each other. In other words, there is no proper procedure for safe entry and exit via the gates.

In one of the schools, the surrounding environment poses a threat to learner safety, in the form of a pile of rocks near the classrooms. The school does not have the money to hire earthmoving equipment to remove the rocks. When learners are running during break there is a possibility that they could tumble and get injured in the process. The pile of rocks can also harbour snakes and scorpions.

The nutritional programme is a government programme which was implemented unexpectedly. Learners collect food from the helpers, but there is no order when food is served in the absence of educators. Some learners are bullies and demand more food, thus causing danger to other learners. Educators are reluctant to become involved as they are overloaded with teaching and paperwork. This situation leads to safety being compromised. Learners and educators face serious challenges in terms of school-wide behavioural expectations regarding nutritional programmes. Educators do not get enough training in how to manage the new programmes. Furthermore, learners are served food on steel plates, and some of them use these plates and spoons to harass each other.

Safety will always suffer if there is no proper supervision. Sprague and Walker (2005, p. 107) are of the opinion that active supervision works by giving supervisors increased opportunities for positive contact with a large percentage of students, and for reinforcing appropriate student behaviour. Supervisors need to be provided with effective methods of doing this, and for dealing with sanctions and the consequences of inappropriate behaviour. High rates of positive contact with individuals or groups of learners can substantially reduce student problem behaviour (Sprague & Walker, 2005, p. 107).



#### **5.2.4 Question number 4: How do schools deal with carrying weapons to school?**

Oosthuizen (2005, p. 36) asserts that guns are carried to school as toys to show off or for the purpose of self-defence. Boys also bring guns to school to protect their girlfriends from gangsters. This study revealed that learners bring various forms of weapons to the schools in question, giving the excuse that they are for self-defence. The weapons include knives, pangas, sticks, screwdrivers, axes, pairs of scissors, needles and hammers. Learners use these weapons to attack other learners and educators in violent fights. Due to fact that there are no proper gate controls, learners find it easy to smuggle weapons into school.

Some learners become bold enough to report such incidents to the principal or safety committee. The schools under study indicated that they confiscate the weapons and record the cases in their punishment log books. Parents are requested to come to school to witness their children's behaviour. A very serious case will warrant a suspension. In one of the schools, a learner was suspended for a week for bringing an undesirable weapon onto the school premises.

Discussions are held during parent meetings at which Ward councillors are sometimes asked to make presentations. There is an attempt to form partnerships with local organisations, such as the SAPS, community policing forums, churches and businesses. Oosthuizen (2005, p. 36) highlights such strategies as being effective. In one of the schools under study, there is a programme for pastors and church leaders to come and preach during assemblies, to uplift learners spiritually. As a result, some learners end up confessing their evil deeds and conduct campaigns amongst the others. However, some schools do not have any plan or procedures to deal with carrying dangerous weapons.

#### **5.2.5 Question number 5: How do schools deal with bullying?**

Espelage and Swearer (2003) note that bullying and harassment by peers are now commonplace in most schools in the USA. These harmful social events are recognised as problems worldwide requiring adult attention and intervention. Numerous schools and experts on bullying have described the international attention focussed on these problems and have noted the efforts of countries outside the United States to document bullying and harassment problems (Sprague & Walker, 2005, p. 77-78). Nesper et al. (2003, p. 127) define

bullying among learners as intentional, repeated, hurtful acts, words or other behaviour, such as name-calling, threatening or shunning commitment, by a child or children against another child or children (Oosthuizen, 2005, p. 19).

Evidence generated from my research findings confirm that School Management Teams in the Motetema Circuit face complex, and often unfamiliar challenges, when attempting to intervene effectively in cases of bullying and harassment of learners. I discovered that learners who display bullying and harassing behaviour also pose a danger to educators. Female educators are at the mercy of bullying learners, some of whom refuse to go to the principal's office when reprimanded. The procedure adopted in the schools under study is to call on the disciplinary committee, which is composed mostly of male educators. The incident is usually recorded in a discipline book. If the learner repeats the same offence, his/her parents are called in to the school. The learner can be suspended; however, the procedure is not clearly defined. In some instances male educators in turn harass these learners physically and suppress them. Some female teachers shout at such learners due to frustration. It is not easy for class monitors to try to write their names down and submit them to the teachers. I discovered that some of the educators are very weak in dealing with bullies, which encourages them to harass other learners and confiscate their belongings.

Some bullies even harass their parents in front of educators. Frustrated parents end up recommending corporal punishment, although this is unlawful. Sometimes the police are involved, but they can do little unless a formal case is filed. It is a negative approach to relay on the police in educational disciplinary matters. Most of the School Management Teams confirmed that any intervention for harassment is quite difficult, complex and costly. In some schools they make referrals to social workers. The idea is to try to modify the perpetrators' behaviour to a certain extent.

Another problem is that there is no finance planning by schools in the Motetema Circuit to deal with bullying and harassment. Sometimes the perpetrators are exposed at assembly to shame them, but they always get support from their peers. They end up forming squads that intimidate learners who report them. One of the educators was confronted after school on the street by boys who had disguised themselves.

I found that there are common areas where active supervision of learners should be promoted: the taps during breaks, the gates after school, hallways, corridors, playgrounds, empty classrooms, and during and after morning assembly.

### **5.2.6 Question number 6: What is the role of the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety?**

I discovered that class monitors tend to be members of the RCL. They are the leaders in the classroom and see to it that order prevails. Some of them are effective, but others do not exercise any of their powers in controlling the classroom. In some of the schools under study, class monitors have books in which to record the names of troublesome learners in the absence of educators.

Most School Management Teams believe that learners should always be in uniform during school hours, on school trips, and during official activities after school hours. School Management Teams believe that learners who are always in uniform will be safe and easier to control. Representative Councils of Learners help to implement school uniform policy to ensure that learners do not behave like strangers. I discovered that during casual day when learners come to school not wearing the school uniform, the level of bullying was very high, and more incidents relating to safety were reported. Therefore School Management Teams make a point of punishing learners for refusing to wear the prescribed uniform.

During the nutritional programme, learner representatives are the ones who collect food on behalf of their classes. This is done to create and maintain order. Disciplined behaviour at all times is essential for the well-being of the school and the successful achievement of the school's objectives. Squelch (2000, p. 71) found that in some schools, the learners representative council is given a timeslot during assembly to discourage learners who are a threat to others. I discovered that the Representative Council of Learners assists in the development of classroom rules that discourage teasing, stealing, name-calling, put-downs, and they help to post signs throughout the school. School Management Teams are also trying, with the few resources they have, to train the Representative Council of Learners in conflict resolution skills and strategies, anger management, respect for self and others, and effective communication skills.

The RCL can play a role in discouraging dangerous games in the school grounds and supervising learners who stay in the classroom during breaks. I also discovered that some schools use the RCL to help identify strangers and report them quickly to educators. They are the schools' whistle-blowers in terms of learners who gamble, smoke or take drugs at school. Educators alone may not be able to deal with safety risks at school, without the assistance of the Representative Council of Learners. Some of the RCL members are trained in first aid procedures, specifically those focussing on sports-related injuries.

### **5.2.7 Question number 7: Do schools have rules for dealing with crisis issues such as shootings, stabbings, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunch time duties?**

I discovered that, although there is an attempt by the schools under study to ensure the safety of learners, their rules or plans for dealing with crisis issues are not always clear. Most of the School Management Teams in the Motetema Circuit use a situational approach. The answer is always the same: *Lack of resources and support from the Department of Education*. There are no rules for lunch time duties when educators also take their lunch break.

In one of the schools under study, they discourage learners from forming groups behind buildings or in corridors, in order to reduce the likelihood of a crisis situation. Police are called if there is a situation such as stabbing, and well as the ambulance. The schools under study do not have spare rooms to use as sick bays. Some of them just have a space where injured learners can be rested until the ambulance arrives.

The observations that I made reveal that cases are recorded and parents are involved. The procedures are more or less the same, although they are not clearly documented. There is no consistency in the steps followed. In some cases justice prevails, while in others it does not, and different emotions may be involved. If the perpetrator is related to one of the educators, or from a well-known family, then the approach tends to be noticeably lenient. I studied two similar cases in the punishment book at one of the schools. Both learners were guilty of bullying – in the first case, the culprit was asked to go and call his parents, but he was allowed to continue with his lessons. Another day a similar incident happened, but that learner was suspended for a week.

Oosthuizen (2005) recommends that, specifically with reference to safety at schools, the fundamental learner rights found in Chapter 2 of the Constitution (Republic of South Africa, 1996a, Section 9) should prevail, namely that learners should be provided with equal protection and benefit of the law, the full and equal enjoyment of their rights and freedoms, and protection from any unfair discrimination (Oosthuizen, 2005, p. 62). I discovered that such rules and fundamental rights are not clear to learners, as they are not exposed to them.

### **5.2.8 Question number 8: How do schools monitor the safety of learners in the school?**

I found that most School Management Teams do not have a clear system for monitoring safety at school. No monitoring tool is supplied by the circuit or district office, unlike the curriculum section, whereby there are different instruments to monitor continuous assessment and quality of work. The schools under study are monitoring safety at random. As a result, in one school there is a plan only to control late comers. Some educators do not even care or take action if learners are threatening each other. On my observation visit to one school, an incident occurred. I saw a number of educators running to the scene, while others were just sitting and relaxing. When I asked who was responsible for safety on that particular day, the answer was not clear. It appeared that only the educators who are concerned about the safety of the learners are the ones who attempt to resolve incidents.

Most often, principals are the ones who move around the school to make sure that learners are settled. Most educators indicated that they are overloaded and do not have time to 'police' learners. Only in one school did the class teachers have record books to log all incidents of learner misbehaviour. Some of the educators claimed to be monitoring the situation from their offices or the staff room. Since there are no well-formulated monitoring plans, educators can only be reactive to incidents as they occur. Sprague and Walker (2005, p. 77-78) indicate that teachers can provide an important service to children and parents by supporting and protecting those who appear to be vulnerable to peer-related aggression, bullying, and harassment. The same authors say further that teachers are in a solid position to screen and identify young aggressive students.

### **5.2.9 Question number 9: How do schools monitor the safety of learners in the school during strikes by educators?**

I discovered that there is no attempt by any of the schools A, B or C to put systems in place to monitor learners during teachers' strikes. In some cases, educators just disappeared without informing learners about what was happening or when they should return to school. Learners started to linger around the school. They tried to ask educators about what was happening, but educators were reluctant to tell them, as they were not actually aware of the outcome. Some of the learners were not even wearing school uniform. One of the respondents said: *"I cannot comment much about the safety of learners as I was not on duty; that is the issue of the government."*

I found that some learners started playing games at school without the supervision of educators; even strangers were tempted to come to school and mingle with learners, which is very dangerous for the safety of learners. Young, weaker learners and those who might be pregnant are always at risk in the absence of educators, especially during a strike. If an incident occurs, nobody will take responsibility for calling the ambulance or the police. In one school there was an attempt to use the RCL to maintain order during a strike, but it was a futile exercise as learners do not have the capacity to monitor each other effectively. In the absence of educators, the learners fought for the few resources in the school, such as water and access to playgrounds.

In school C the situation was better. They engaged the chairperson of the SGB and the president of the RCL to monitor learners. Unfortunately, the principal's office was locked and they could not use proper instruments to record incidents at school. The report was given to the School Management Team after the strike.

## **5.3 Summary of the findings and their implications**

This study investigated challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of safety issues in the Motetema Circuit. The challenges were identified, among others, as formulating safety policies, implementing safety policies, monitoring safety policies, a lack of resources, lack of support from the Department of Education, and a lack of trained

security personnel. All these factors make it difficult for safety policies to be implemented and support to be offered to the School Management Teams.

### **5.3.1 Formulating and drafting safety policies**

Evidence, supported by the findings, suggests that School Management Teams are not clear about the formulation of safety policies. This is due to the lack of a common approach or guidelines from the Department of Education. The situation is compounded by the fact that the SMTs do not undergo training relating to the formulation of safety policies.

### **5.3.2 Implementing safety policies**

I found that it is a challenge for School Management Teams in the Motetema Circuit to implement safety policies. This is due to the lack of support from other staff members. Class teachers are reluctant to implement classroom policies and most of them seem not to be actively involved.

### **5.3.3 Common factors leading to safety being compromised**

I found that safety of learners is compromised due to a lack of monitoring and supervision by educators. Learners found themselves alone most of the time. During break there are no educators on duty to monitor them, and corridors and dangerous corners at school are unattended.

### **5.3.4 Bullying and carrying weapons to school**

There is no programme or plan in place to deal with bullying at the schools under study. It is difficult to conduct searches to identify learners who carry weapons to school. Those who are found with dangerous weapons are punished and the weapons are confiscated. Learners who fail in their studies and repeat classes several times are always a risk, due to the fact that they lose hope. This results in learners who are over-aged and they tend to be troublesome.

### **5.3.5 Lack of trained security personnel**

Most schools hire cheap or inexperienced security personnel, due to the lack of funds. The security personnel are there only to open and close the gates, and it is not easy for them to

search learners who may have weapons. Educators are even afraid to work overtime because they feel that they are not safe. One of the principals was attacked when he was working overtime into the late hours.

### **5.3.6 The role of the Representative Council of Learners and rules for dealing with crisis issues**

I found that the role played by the Representative Council of Learners is not effective. There are no programmes at schools to train them about safety and social issues. Most of them are merely used as ‘whistle-blowers’ when there is an incident. They record troublesome learners, but are vulnerable to intimidation and threats by bullies.

### **5.3.7 Risk areas and monitoring**

There are vulnerable areas in the schools, such as toilets, corridors, unused classrooms, gates and sports fields. I found that most of the harmful activities take place in these areas. Such activities almost always happen in the absence of educators, due to the lack of monitoring plans and regulations. This is compounded by the fact that educators do not undergo training relating to monitoring and implementing safety measures at school. The department should assist schools in designing safety policies, which are supportive and easily monitored.

### **5.3.8 Monitoring of learners during strikes by educators**

I found that during a strike by educators, there are no effective plans at school in terms of the safety of learners. The School Governing Body and Representative Council of Learners are given responsibilities in terms of making sure that learners are safe in the absence of educators. However, these duties are alien to them and learners do not respect them. For example, the Representative Council of Learners and School Governing Body are not allowed to mark attendance registers for learners. Therefore it is not easy to keep learners in the classroom, and when learners are on their own, there are increased risks to their safety.



## 5.4 Recommendations

These recommendations emerge from the suggestions made by School Management Teams regarding school safety measures. The recommendations are believed to be a remedy to address problems or challenges facing School Management Teams in terms of school safety issues, particularly at schools in the Motetema Circuit.

1. The Department of Education should hire trained security personnel for schools, as they do in departmental offices.
2. All strangers coming into a school should be recorded and the purpose of their visit indicated.
3. Corridors should be closed and toilets should be fenced off so that learners cannot go behind them.
4. Continuous support and training should be offered to the School Management Teams by the Department of Education with regard to safety measures.
5. Safety awareness campaigns should to be conducted in partnership with the community and the police. Awareness boards should be erected to inform learners and strangers.
6. Award presentation ceremonies for good behaviour should be conducted regularly.
7. The School Governing Body should allocate funds to deal with safety matters at school.
8. All safety incidents at school should be recorded regularly. Safety plans should be given priority to make sure that learners and educators concentrate on learning and teaching and do not have to worry about their safety.
9. All unused metal objects, bricks and rocks should be removed from school grounds as learners tend to use them as weapons.
10. The government and schools should put systems in place to guarantee the safety of learners during strikes by educators.

Without trained security personnel at schools, the safety of learners and educators will always be at risk. The Department of Education should help schools to screen strangers coming through school gates to ensure that safety is improved at schools. The Department should also introduce a unit at the circuit level, to deal specifically with safety issues at schools. This unit can also be tasked with training educators at the school level. The community should be aware of the intention of schools in terms of safety issues through

safety awareness campaigns. Good behaviour should be recognised and rewarded regularly. All incidents in schools should be recorded consistently and the safety of learners during a strike by educators should not be compromised.

## **5.5 Conclusion**

This research study has examined challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of school safety issues. The following factors, among others, were investigated:

1. Formulation and drafting of safety policies
2. Implementation of safety policies
3. Carrying weapons to school and bullying
4. The role played by the Representative Council of Learners in dealing with safety issues
5. Monitoring and supervising learners
6. Safety of learners when educators are on strike.

In conclusion, I found that schools in the Motetema Circuit need serious support in terms of school safety matters. Interviews with School Management Teams of the schools under study confirm that the Department of Education does not offer adequate support. This need for support is reflected by the number of cases recorded at schools, some of which are also reported at the nearest police station. School Management Teams, in collaboration with the government, should offer support to educators by conducting regular workshops and providing them with the necessary resources. The involvement of all stakeholders in terms of safety issues is very important, including parents and the community.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1: Letter and consent form to principals

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#### UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

Faculty of Education  
School of Educational Studies  
Department of Educational Management and Policy

To: Limpopo Province Department of Education  
Motetema Circuit  
Greater Sekhukhune District  
School:.....

#### RESEARCH PROJECT: FIELD WORK

The Department of Educational Management and Policy hereby requests you to grant our MED postgraduate student permission to conduct research in schools under your jurisdiction.

TOPIC: Challenges of School Management Teams in terms of school safety issues.

Thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

.....

.....

Student: A.N. Makungo

Supervisor: Dr Keshni Bipath

## Appendix 2: Letter and consent form to the Department of Education, head office, district office and circuit office

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TO :

Limpopo Province of Education  
Motetema Circuit  
Sekhukhune District  
Name of School:

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### RESEARCH PROJECT: FIELD WORK

You are cordially invited to participate in the research project: “Challenges of School Management Team in terms of school safety” to be conducted by Makungo A.N., M.Ed candidate in the Department of Education Management and Policy Studies at the University of Pretoria.

The research seeks to examine the experience of School Management Teams in relation to school safety. If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed once for a period, and asked to be free, open and frank in answering the questions. All the questions relate to the challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of safety issues.

Your identity will be protected to the best of the researcher’s ability. All the data and tape recordings will be kept confidential and your identity will remain anonymous in the final report. Your participation in this project is voluntary and the information will be used for the research study only. You may choose to withdraw and not to participate at any time without any penalty.

For more information about the research process, feel free to contact Dr Keshni Bipath.

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Faculty of Education  
University of Pretoria  
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Fax: 012 420 3581

**Appendix 3: Interview Schedule, Observation Schedule and Interview Questions**

**Student no: 24493245**

**Name: Makungo A N**

**Interview Schedule**

<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>TIME</b>
School A	8 November 2010	13:00 – 15:00
School B	9 November 2010	13:00 – 15:00
School C	10 November 2010	13:00 – 15:00

**Observation Schedule**

<b>SCHOOL</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>TIME</b>	<b>ITEMS OBSERVED</b>
School A	15 November 2010	7:30 – 12:00	Learners during free period
School B	16 November 2010	8:00 – 13:00	Learners on the sports ground
School C	17 November 2010	9:00 – 14:00	Learners during break and after school

**Student no: 24493245**

**Name: Makungo A N**

## **Interview Questions**

What are the challenges faced by School Management Teams in terms of school safety issues in the Motetema Circuit?

- How do you draft and formulate safety policies?
- How do you implement and value school safety policies?
- What are the common factors that lead to safety being compromised?
- How do you deal with carrying weapons to school?
- How do you deal with bullying?
- What is the role of the Representative Council of Learners in terms of safety?
- Do you have rules for dealing with crisis issues such as shootings, stabbings, assault with sharp objects, and teacher lunch time duties?
- How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school?
- How do you monitor the safety of learners in the school during strikes by educators?

#### Appendix 4: Participation Observation Grid

1. Who is in the group or scene?
2. What is happening?
  - a. What behaviour is repetitive and irregular?
  - b. How do the people in the group behave towards one another?
  - c. What is the content of their interaction?
3. Where are the groups located?
4. When does the group meet and interact?
5. How do the identified elements interact – from either the participants’ or the researchers’ perspective?
6. Why does the group operate as it does?

As well as the participant observation grid above, a table was used to detail particular events and findings, a sample of which is illustrated below.

Date	Observed	Duration	Findings
20/09/2009	Fight on the field during break	15 minutes	Fighting for the ball, no educators were nearby during the break
21/09/2009	Fighting for food during the nutritional programme in the class.	20 minutes	Shortage of plates Educators not there Not enough food

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