

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION, PROBLEM-FORMULATION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

Adventure implies risk, excitement, uncertainty, challenge, hazard, daring and boldness. Participation in four summer camps in the USA has been the most adventurous experience undertaken by the researcher. After 7 years experience as social worker adventure-based programmes appeared to the researcher, to be an exciting intervention strategy for life-skills development in early adolescents.

The nature and extent of camps (adventure-based programmes) in the USA is simply amazing. More than six million children and adults participate in a variety of outdoor recreational and educational experiences offered by 8500+ day and residential camps. The value of these outdoor camping experiences is reflected in the motto of the American Camping Association: **“Camp gives kids a world of good”**.

Organized camping originated in the USA (Ball & Ball, 1990:3). This progressive educational medium initially started as a recreational experience with the aim to teach physical skills for everyday life. A shift in the emphasis away from outdoor activities and outdoor interests occurred as the educational value of camps was realized. Expert instruction and specialized curriculums were introduced. A knowledge base developed and training courses were introduced at many tertiary institutions in the USA. Accreditation standards were formulated and a professional association – the American Camping Association (ACA) – was born (Ball & Ball, 1990:3-5).

In South Africa where camps are a traditional and respected form of recreation, there appears to be an increased interest in outdoor programmes, especially those with a high adventure-based content. Social workers also appear to be increasingly interested in the use of adventure-based programmes as alternative

intervention strategy for youth-at-risk, due to increasing numbers of adolescents becoming involved in high-risk behaviour, compromising their health, future and lives. It is crucial to intervene before youth are “lost”. Multi-professional interventions are necessary to address the issues and problems experienced by children and youth. Early adolescents need to experience feelings of competence and success in the environments in which they live.

Adventure-based programmes offers a solution and many skills necessary for successful living appear to be inherent to adventure-based learning: self-esteem, communication, problem-solving, group living, responsibility, spirituality, confidence. The social work profession (knowledge, value and skill base) is eminently suitable – if not the best suited of all professions – to intervene in the lives of at-risk adolescents through adventure-based programmes.

Many different terms are used to describe essentially similar outdoor programmes: adventure education, environmental education, experiential education, wilderness therapy, organized camping, outdoor education, etc. The term “adventure-based programme” was used in this research.

The literature study undertaken reflects the outstanding potential of adventure-based programmes on child and youth development. Organizing and presenting adventure-based programmes demand effective and efficient outdoor leaders. There is far more to an adventure-based programme than taking youth out into the outdoors and merely presenting activities to occupy the participants.

In South Africa participation and interest in adventure programmes and activities are growing. The adventure-based field has taken significant strides in the last decade and although a few research studies have been undertaken, this is not merely enough in a field where millions of rands have been spent on developing new programmes and facilities. This research represents the first of its kind to determine the nature, requirements and limitations of adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk, with the aim of formulating guidelines.

## **1.2 MOTIVATION FOR SELECTION OF THE RESEARCH TOPIC**

### **1.2.1 THE NEED FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT**

Children and youth are undoubtedly the biggest asset of any society. The structure of the family, the composition of the work force and the nature of communities in South Africa have changed dramatically after the 1994 democratic elections. It can not be taken for granted that our youth will grow up with the necessary resources, skills and experiences that will enable them to complete their developmental tasks. With the onset of adolescence significant physical, social, emotional and cognitive changes occur in the child. It is at this stage that many adolescents engage in risk taking behaviour, e.g. chemical substance abuse. The impact of these negative behaviours on the individual and the community is enormous. It would be far wiser to prevent feelings and experiences of failure by providing opportunities for competence development and success (Danish, 1996:367).

### **1.2.2 ADVENTURE-BASED PROGRAMMES IS AN ANSWER**

Adventure-based programmes is an exciting intervention option that is based on competency development, focussing on promoting positive behaviour rather than preventing or treating negative behaviour. Participation in adventure-based programmes has become increasingly popular as intervention strategy to develop life skills in early adolescents. These include both interpersonal skills (communication, group living, problem-solving, decision-making) and intrapersonal skills (self-esteem, spirituality, sense of belonging, sense of mastery). Adventure-based programmes appear to encourage and enable the development of these skills through challenging and engaging activities (Moote & Wodarski, 1997:148). Activities like canoeing, abseiling, hiking and outdoor living skills appear to be appealing to the majority of adolescents.

Adventure-based programmes are organized around many small group experiences, e.g. the cabin unit. The small group is also a natural and highly

attractive setting for most adolescents. Therapeutic intervention on a one-to-one basis is expensive and extremely time-consuming. Social workers and other persons in the helping profession are faced with dwindling resources and overwhelming problems. Working with youth in a group context is a viable alternative (Schoeman & van der Merwe, 1996:3).

Many youths who commit one-time situational anti-social or delinquent acts do not suffer from any significant pathological disorder and are best served by least restrictive intervention. Kimball (1990:12) is of the opinion that an adventure-based programme “avoids the contaminating effects of institutional care, which often results in anti-social attitudes and an undermining of the individual’s sense of self”.

After spending four “summers” at a residential adventure-based programme catering largely for youth-at-risk in the USA, the researcher’s motivation and excitement regarding the intervention potential of adventure-based programmes is undiminished.

### **1.2.3 ADVENTURE-BASED PROGRAMMES ARE GROUNDED IN SOUND PRACTISE PRINCIPLES**

Adventure-based programmes utilizes **trained leadership** and the **resources of the natural environment** to offer a **goal orientated** adventure-based **activity**, usually conducted in **small groups** and based on **experiential learning**, to achieve **developmentally appropriate learning objectives**.

## **1.3 PROBLEM-FORMULATION**

South Africa faces huge challenges in addressing the needs of her children: high unemployment rate, limited resources, a growing younger population, high levels of violence and crime, overcrowded and unhealthy accommodation, lack of recreation facilities, high rates of sexual abuse and the impact of HIV/AIDS. South African children grow up in very diverse family and household structures. In

poor families children are likely to under-achieve in school and often do not complete their schooling; becoming prone to crime and violence. Poverty impacts negatively on family life and can force children onto the streets. The challenge is to effectively intervene in the lives of children and youth before they compromise their futures with damaging risk-taking behaviour.

### **1.3.1 DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA**

A report by the “National Program of Action for Children in South Africa” (NPA), titled “Children in 2001, A Report on the state of the Nation’s Children” (2001:28) provides information obtained from the 1996 Census. A total of 16 333 349 children under 18 years of age was recorded of whom 81% are African, 9% Coloured, 8 % White and 2% Indian. The largest age groups are 5-9 years (11,5%) and 10-14 years (11.5%). Children under 18 years comprise 40% of the South African population. This implies that children of 18 years and younger will dominate the age distribution of the South African population in the short to medium term.

### **1.3.2 SOCIAL PROFILE OF CHILDREN IN SOUTH AFRICA**

The above-mentioned report (NPA, 2001:27) also provides the following information:

- Six out of every 10 children live in poverty, mostly in rural areas.
- In 1998 22,8 percent of women attending antenatal clinics in public health facilities were HIV positive. The rate of increase amongst teenagers in the age group 15-19 was 65,4% from the previous year; 180 000 children under 15 were estimated to have lost their mother or both parents to AIDS.
- An estimated 5% of children between the ages of 10 and 16 are not in school.
- The pass rate for the grade 12 examinations in 2000 was 57,9%.

- At least half a million children have moderate to severe disabilities and need access to specialist services.
- Forty two percent (42%) of children under 7 years live with a single mother and 20% do not live with either parent.
- In 1998 the Child Protection Unit and specialist personnel dealt with 37 352 crimes against children, of which 57% were sexual offences.
- Child labour figures were estimated at 200 000 involving children between 10 and 14 years. An unspecified number of children are subject to commercial sexual exploitation.
- In September 1999 there were 2026 children awaiting trial in South African prisons and 1375 serving sentences.

The bleak picture sketched by the data above of the youth in South Africa, places increased pressure on social workers and others in helping professions to identify and utilize effective preventive and/or intervention strategies to help early adolescents succeed in the environment in which they live.

### **1.3.3 CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES IN SOUTH AFRICA**

According to the Census of 1996 4% of the children were reported to have disabilities; the majority had sight (36%), hearing (22%) and physical disabilities(15%) according to the NPA (2001:114). The NPA (2001:113) reports further that most of the children with disabilities live in extreme poverty and the parents of such children are often ostracised due to myths and ignorance about disability. This negatively impacts on the survival of the family unit, the self-esteem and meaningful development of the child with a disability. Youths with disabilities are less likely to gain access to development programmes, since they had little or no access to formal education. Children and youth with disabilities are regarded as a particularly vulnerable group.

Youth with disabilities are grossly neglected in social service delivery, yet their needs for personal developmental opportunities such as adventure-based programmes are equally important.

## **1.4 GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH**

### **1.4.1 GOAL**

The goal of the research is: The development of guidelines for intervention through adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk.

### **1.4.2 OBJECTIVES**

1.4.2.1 To compile a theoretical framework for adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk by means of a literature study.

1.4.2.2 To explore and describe the nature, requirements and needs of adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk by means of a literature study and empirical research.

1.4.2.3 To develop guidelines for intervention through adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk, based on the research findings.

## **1.5 RESEARCH QUESTION**

Research studies on adventure-based programmes in South Africa are extremely limited and this lack of research is a hindrance to the formulation of hypotheses. It was imperative to first explore and describe adventure-based programmes from which variables could be identified to formulate hypotheses. The following research question was formulated for the research study:

**What is the nature, requirements and limitations of adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk?**

## **1.6 RESEARCH APPROACH**

This research combines both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative approach measures the social world objectively, testing hypotheses to predict human behaviour. Within this approach data collection is systematically undertaken in a standardized manner. Exact figures are gained and the data analysis is undertaken by means of standardized statistical procedures (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 240-242). The questionnaire completed by outdoor leaders forms part of the quantitative approach of this research study.

On the other hand the qualitative approach stems from an interpretative approach, being more holistic in nature, with the aim of understanding social life and the meaning people attach to an aspect of everyday life (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 240-242). This design is more flexible and cannot be exactly replicated. The data obtained are analyzed by extracting themes. The semi-structured interviews conducted with programme leaders renders the research qualitative in nature.

## **1.7 TYPE OF RESEARCH**

The goal of this study is applied research and specifically knowledge development. Knowledge development is empirical research which is undertaken “to extend knowledge of human behaviour relating to human service intervention” (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 69). Through knowledge development basic knowledge is provided for understanding aspects of the intervention and it is not always easy to distinguish between basic research and knowledge development. Due to the fact that this research provides practical guidelines for intervention, the study is considered to be applied research (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 70).

## **1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design is the detailed plan of how the research study will be executed (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 77). The phenomenon of adventure-based programmes in South Africa are explored in this study as relatively little is known



about this intervention strategy. Insights are gained, central concepts explained and new hypotheses formulated.

In view of the above this study utilized the hypothesis developing, exploratory research design from a quantitative perspective and the phenomenology design for the qualitative part of this research study.

## **1.9 RESEARCH PROCEDURES**

### **1.9.1 DATA COLLECTION METHODS**

#### **1.9.1.1 QUESTIONNAIRES**

The “New dictionary of social work” (1995:51) defines a questionnaire as a “set of questions on a form which is completed by the respondent in respect of a research project”.

The questions in the research questionnaires were mainly closed and many statements were provided on which respondents were requested to react. Matrix questions, i.e. “several questions that have the same set of answer categories” was also included (Babbie, 1998:156). This format offers several advantages compared to other formats: it uses space efficiently, respondents find it easier to complete and comparability of responses given to different questions is increased (Babbie,1998:156). The problem of respondents assuming that all statements represented the same orientation, was counteracted by alternating statements representing different orientations and by making all statements short and clear.

The objective of the questionnaire was to obtain information on the outdoor leader, youth-at-risk, the adventure-based programme and general issues, including terminology and provision for special populations.

The questionnaire was mailed to respondents and self-administered. A copy of the questionnaire used in the research can be studied (See Addendum A). Clear instructions for the completion of each question was provided. Mailing the

questionnaire had the advantage of being less costly than interviews, reaching a large number of respondents spread over a large geographical area - in this research, the whole of South Africa.

In total 140 questionnaires were distributed in March and April 2001, to individuals, organizations and companies offering adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk. The number of questionnaires returned was 104, of which 93 were completed and 11 non-completed. Reasons provided for non-completion were mainly that the organization did not offer residential programmes and that too many questionnaires were sent, i.e. 2 questionnaires were sent to an organization employing only one outdoor leader.

The response rate of 72.09% can be regarded as excellent (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 153; Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:112). Missing data on the questionnaire was extremely limited and only one question had a response rate below 90% (88.17%). The high response rate can be attributed to personal contact, mainly telephonic between the researcher and outdoor leaders before and after the questionnaires were mailed to respondents. Stamped envelopes were also included for each questionnaire. These efforts to ensure a high response rate were extremely costly and time consuming, but ultimately worth every cent and minute.

### **1.9.1.2 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

Interviews were conducted with programme leaders, i.e. outdoor leaders in a supervisory capacity in an organization offering adventure-based programmes. An interview guide was used during these in-depth or focussed interviews. Hudelson (1996:12) defines the purpose of a focussed interview as “to gain as complete and detailed an understanding as possible of the topic at hand”. Prior exploration of the topic is required in order to know which relevant issues are to be covered.

The interview guide was structured around the nature, requirements and limitations of adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk. The exact order and wording of the questions varied from interviewee to interviewee. Interviews had the added benefit of allowing the researcher to follow leads and new topics which

arose in the course of the interview, without losing focus of the main questions to be asked. Hudelson (1996:13) points out another strength: “ ... because the same core list of questions are asked of each respondent, the data from these interviews are easier to systemize”.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 28 interviewees during 24 interviews in April and May 2001. The number of interviews conducted in the different provinces of South Africa are as follows: Kwa Zulu Natal – 7, Gauteng – 4, Western Cape – 10 and Eastern Cape – 2. A total distance of 6 500 kilometres was travelled by the researcher to conduct these interviews. A list of names of the persons with whom semi-structured interviews were conducted is attached (see Addendum B).

Wherever the term “interviewee” is used in this research document, it refers to outdoor leaders with whom the researcher conducted a semi-structured interview; the term “respondent” is used to refer to outdoor leaders who completed the questionnaire.

## **1.9.2 ORGANIZATIONAL PLAN**

This research was undertaken in the private capacity of the researcher and no organization or government department was involved with any aspect of organizing or executing this research project. No research assistants were used for data collection.

## **1.9.3 DATA ANALYSIS**

### **1.9.3.1 DATA ANALYSIS IN QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Marshall and Rossman’s approach (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 342) to data analysis from a qualitative approach was utilised to analyse data obtained from the semi-structured interviews:

#### **1.9.3.1.1 Organizing the data**

All the interviews were recorded on cassette, whereafter they were typed out in text format, typed and bound in book form. The data were organized in two columns: unedited information from interview and themes/categories.

Why work with tapes? It is difficult to rely on recollections of conversations and the audio recordings allowed the researcher to focus on actual details. Tape recordings can be replayed, transcriptions improved and different themes and categories can be investigated (Silverman, 2000:81).

#### **1.9.3.1.2 Generating categories, themes and patterns**

After the interviews were transcribed word for word, the researcher identified the themes, ideas and patterns of belief emerging from the data. As the interviews were reviewed, specific themes emerged, e.g. outdoor leaders need to be positive role models. Hypotheses were not formulated prior to the study and the aim of the research was not to test pre-conceived ideas.

Through inductive, open-ended analysis the researcher was able to make generalizations from the uncovered themes and categories. Logical analysis was utilized to “cross-classify schemes” with one another to generate new insights (De Vos, *et al.* 1998: 342). The advantage of cross-classifications is that logical discrepancies in the analysed data are revealed.

#### **1.9.3.1.3 Testing emergent hypotheses**

As categories and patterns were identified, hypotheses developed and through a process of evaluation the researcher began to test these hypotheses against the data. A part of this process included an evaluation of the adequacy, credibility and usefulness of the data obtained.

#### **1.9.3.1.4 Searching for alternative explanations**

During this phase the researcher attempted to find alternative explanations for the patterns and themes within the data and the linkages between them.

#### **1.9.3.1.5 Writing the report**

The data obtained from the interviews were incorporated in this research report.

### **1.9.3.2 DATA ANALYSIS IN QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH**

The data obtained from the questionnaires were analysed by computer. Data analysis in the quantitative approach requires the breaking down of data into “constituent parts to obtain answers to research questions” (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:203). Data as such do not answer research questions. It is the interpretation of the analysed data, i.e. finding meaning, explanations and implications, that provides answers to the research question.

In univariate analysis “one variable is analysed, mainly with a view to describing that variable” (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:204). The data on each variable were summarized and displayed through frequency distributions and graphic presentations, e.g. doughnut graphs, histograms and pie charts.

## **1.10 THE PILOT STUDY**

### **1.10.1 LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature review (Chapter 2) provides a clearer understanding of the nature, dimensions and complexities of adventure-based programmes for youth-at-risk; above all it highlights the immense potential of adventure-based programmes as alternative intervention strategy which confirms the need for this research study.

Literature resources used in this research project are as diverse as the adventure-based field itself. The bibliography reflects the fact that adventure-based programmes draw on the knowledge from several disciplines: social work, psychology, education, leisure and recreation, environmental education and management. Articles from ten different types of professional magazines were utilized and one in particular, the “Camping Magazine” published by the American Camping Association, was obtained directly from the USA as it is not available in South Africa.

### **1.10.2 CONSULTATION WITH EXPERTS**

The researcher worked at Camp Westminster in Michigan, USA, for 4 seasons: 1995 – counsellor; 1997 – health officer; 2001 – programme director; 2002 – programme director. During these periods of employment the researcher had the privilege of working with and under the guidance of one of the best camp directors in the United States, Suzanne Getz Bates, who has also served a term as President of 150 Presbyterian camps. For the researcher this “mentorship” period proved to be by far the most valuable training and inspiration any person could dream of. Any information, literature resources, referrals to other “experts” and guidance required or requested were made available to the researcher.

After the camp in 1997 the researcher attended a camping conference in Illinois, USA, travelled across the States and visited various camping facilities, and spent a week at the head office of the American Camping Association (ACA) in Indiana. Interviews with leading professionals in the camping industry were conducted throughout this time. The visit to the head office of ACA was extremely significant as this facility accommodates leading experts who offer training opportunities to outdoor leaders on all aspects of camping programmes. A well equipped library and resource centre from where literature and other resources are distributed is also available at the ACA head office. The implications of these experiences to the researcher are difficult to capture in words and very few outdoor leaders can boast such exposure and enrichment.

In South Africa the researcher initiated contact with many programme leaders in the adventure-based field, including the president of Christian Camping International South Africa (CCISA), the director of EDUCO and the manager of SOS School in the Wilds.

### **1.10.3 FEASIBILITY OF THE RESEARCH**

#### **1.10.3.1 GAINING ENTRANCE TO THE FIELD**

The researcher attended two national conferences on adventure-based programmes in 2000: CCISA (George) and POA (Stellenbosch). During these conferences key professionals in the adventure-based field were met and consulted about the research. These outdoor leaders were extremely positive and supportive of the - at that stage - proposed research.

The introduction to many outdoor leaders and programme leaders at these conferences was an important step in gaining entry to the adventure-based field and is another reason why the response rate on the questionnaires was so high. The researcher is of the opinion that the positive response to the research can also be attributed to the fact that outdoor leaders recognize the immense lack of research in this growing field.

#### **1.10.3.2 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that the research project is conducted in an ethically appropriate manner. Ethics “is a set of moral principles ... which offers rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents” (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:24) and every other role player in the research.

The ethical issues related to this research project were addressed as follows:

**Harm to experimental respondents and informed consent:** Research participants were thoroughly informed about the goal, procedures, advantages and

disadvantages of the research project (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:25). Questionnaire respondents implied consent to participate by completing the questionnaire. Interviewees implied consent by agreeing to an interview, and prior to the interview they were asked whether they had any objections to the use of a tape recorder.

**Confidentiality and anonymity:** Questionnaires were completed anonymously and interviewees had the right to say which information they wanted to reveal anonymously. This research project does not, in general, contain sensitive or personal information that could harm participants; yet confidentiality is ensured and no other person had access to the interview data not included in the research report (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:103; Corey, Corey & Callanan, 1993:229).

**Respect:** All research participants were treated with respect (Grasso & Epstein, 1992:119).

**Competence of researcher:** The researcher is adequately trained as social worker to conduct surveys and investigations in a professionally and ethically appropriate manner (De Vos, *et al.*1998:30).

**Publication of findings:** The research report has been compiled as accurately, objectively and clearly as possible, in order for the reading public to understand and gain benefit from the research findings (De Vos, *et al.*1998:32). Due to a firm belief in the value of this research project, the researcher has gone the “extra mile” by writing the report in English, while her mother tongue is Afrikaans.

### 1.10.3.3 RELIABILITY OF DATA GATHERING METHODS

The reliability of a data gathering instrument “is concerned with the consistency of measures” (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:103); thus, “an instrument is reliable to the extent that independent administrations of it ... yield consistently similar results” (De Vos, *et al.*1998:85).

Through item analysis (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:134) the internal consistency of the questionnaire was established, e.g. it was evident from the research results



that youth-at-risk present challenging behaviour to the outdoor leader. In the question on the skills and personal qualities required by the outdoor leader, respondents rated the skill to manage participants as the most essential skill required.

Methodological triangulation (Hudelson, 1996:54) was used to determine the reliability of the qualitative data obtained through semi-structured interviews. The researcher continued interviews with programme leaders until the same information had been obtained several times. The data from the questionnaires and interviews also reflected similarities.

#### **1.10.3.4 GENERALIZATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS**

It is important to ensure that an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure in order to know what the results mean (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:135). Based on the literature and the experience of the researcher, the items incorporated in the questionnaire and interview guideline were carefully selected to provide a “picture” of adventure-based programmes in South Africa. This process is referred to as “content validity” (De Vos, *et al.*1998:84).

The findings of the research can be generalized due to the representativeness of the outdoor leaders selected to participate in the research project, as is evident in point 1.11.

#### **1.10.4 TESTING THE MEASURING INSTRUMENTS**

One month prior to the distribution of the questionnaire to outdoor leaders, two different organizations were selected to complete the questionnaire. Respondents in this pilot project included both male and female, white and non-white persons, outdoor leaders and programme leaders.

From the results obtained and the feedback received from the respondents minor changes were made to the questionnaire. In order to prepare the researcher for the proposed interviews, two semi-structured interviews were conducted with

programme leaders in two separate organizations different from the ones used to complete the questionnaires.

## **1.11 SAMPLING**

Sampling is a way to “rationalize the collection of information, to choose in an appropriate way the restricted set of ... persons ... from which the actual information will be drawn” (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:85). Gathering data from a sample is less costly and less time-consuming, especially where the population group is extremely large. The term “sample” in itself implies the existence of a bigger group, known as a population or universe (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:190).

### **1.11.1 DEFINING THE RESEARCH POPULATION**

A universe is “all the potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested” (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:190). Everyone involved in adventure-based and other outdoor educational programmes, whether directly (e.g. outdoor leaders) or indirectly (e.g. lecturers), constitute the universe or population of this research project.

### **1.11.2 DEFINING THE RESEARCH SAMPLE**

The sample of a research project should have “properties that make it representative of the whole” (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:88), allowing for accurate generalizations of research results.

#### **1.11.2.1 SAMPLE FOR QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS**

The sample in this research project included outdoor leaders who facilitate residential adventure-based programmes to youth-at-risk in South Africa. These persons were not restricted to any region, race, gender, educational qualification, age or organization. The sample also included programme leaders, i.e. persons in a supervisory capacity to outdoor leaders who are also directly involved with the adventure-based programme.

### **1.11.2 SAMPLE FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

The sample from which the researcher obtained respondents to conduct interviews with can be described as outdoor leaders, programme leaders and other persons involved in offering adventure-based programmes to youth-at-risk, who have at least two years experience in this field and thus can be regarded as knowledgeable on the research topic. No age, race, educational qualification, regional or other requirements were applied with regard to the respondents.

### **1.11.3 METHOD OF SAMPLING**

#### **1.11.3.1 SAMPLING FOR QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS**

A comprehensive name and address list of all known organizations and individuals offering adventure-based programmes to youth-at-risk was compiled. Names and addresses of such organizations were obtained from the Department of Environmental Affairs, CCISA Camp Directory, POA conference address list, media advertisements and articles and the snowball technique, whereby names and addresses were obtained through personal referrals.

The researcher phoned every name on the above mentioned address lists to establish who qualified for the sample, to motivate participation in the research and to ensure that the correct postal details were available. The name and address lists obtained by the researcher with the correct contact details were submitted to the Dept. of Environmental Affairs to add and adapt their current data base at no cost to that Department.

The end result was a list containing 50 names and addresses of organizations offering adventure-based programmes to youth-at-risk. The initial intention of the researcher was to select a random sample from this list, but due to the fact that the researcher wanted to ensure a reasonable sample size which would enable more accurate conclusions and predictions (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:191), two or more questionnaires were mailed to **all** the organizations listed.

### **1.11.3.2 SAMPLING FOR SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS**

Purposive or judgemental sampling was used to select 24 programme leaders, i.e. outdoor leaders in supervisory or senior positions within an organization offering adventure-based programmes to youth-at-risk; to participate in semi-structured interviews. This sampling method is based on the judgement of the researcher regarding the persons in the sample who possess the most representative characteristics or typical attributes of the population (De Vos, *et al.* 1998:198; Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:95).

The researcher deliberately tried to select respondents from diverse programmes and regions throughout South Africa to ensure representation from different segments in the adventure-based field, e.g. persons from established environmental education centres as well as persons from smaller organizations offering adventure-based programmes to youth-at-risk on a part time basis.

## **1.12 DEFINITION OF MAJOR CONCEPTS**

### **1.12.1 INTERVENTION**

The “New Dictionary of Social Work” (1995:35) defines intervention as “professional behaviour of a social worker to bring about change in the person-environment situation ...”.

Planning, implementing and evaluating an intervention should be preceded by assessment and goal formulation. An intervention strategy is a plan that is designed to facilitate the achievement of suggested goals (Rose, 1995:1127). Barker (1987:82) views intervention as “interceding in or coming between groups of people, events, planning activities, or an individual’s internal conflicts. ... It encompasses the other activities social workers use to solve or prevent problems or achieve goals for social betterment”.

Intervention can occur at different levels, and this includes the individual, group, organization, community, institution and society. To make any difference to the

problems children and youths experience, multi-level interventions are necessary (Danish, 1996:366). Adventure-based programmes have become an increasingly popular intervention strategy to working with youth on life-skills issues such as communication, problem-solving, team work and decision-making through challenging and engaging activities (Moote & Wodarski, 1997:148).

Adventure-based programmes use adventure and other outdoor recreational activities in lieu of, or as catalyst to “talk” interventions. The outdoors is seen as a medium and the aim is to use it as a vehicle to provide opportunities for learning about the self, others and the environment. Participation in an adventure-based programme does not cause change in the participant, it merely “highlights a need to change and supports any personal decisions to make changes. ... For these reasons adventure education has become a powerful tool for modifying the behaviours of many client groups ... “ (Priest, 1990a:114).

Intervention through adventure-based programmes is a planned and programmatic effort, usually conducted in groups in the outdoors, which is directed at positively influencing the developmental process of an individual, i.e. contributing to personal growth.

## **1.12.2 ADVENTURE-BASED PROGRAMME**

Many different terms are used to describe a variety of outdoor programmes which have more in common than not: outdoor education, environmental education, adventure education, organized camping, wilderness therapy and experiential education. Defining these terms is no easy task and the information below offers mere descriptions rather than formal definitions.

### **1.12.2.1 OUTDOOR EDUCATION**

Outdoor education is a method, based on experiential learning, which uses the natural environment and all the senses of the individual to encourage and facilitate learning in participants about their relationship to each other and the environment (Priest, 1990a:114; Clayton, 1981:28). This term was widely used in South Africa

in the seventies and eighties. As the adventure-based field developed new definitions were formulated. Priest (1990a:114) regards outdoor education as the trunk with two branches: adventure education and environmental education. Whether it is a method, a process, a subject or topic is still widely debated.

### **1.12.2.2 ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION**

Defining environmental education appears to be more challenging and a variety of definitions exist. The following are some of the issues that appear to be emphasized (Lotz, 2000:4-12): inter-relatedness between human beings, nature and the universe; holistically considering the environment – natural and built, technological and social, economical, political, moral and aesthetic; discovering and solving symptoms and causes of environmental problems; and utilizing diverse learning environments to learning about and from the environment with emphasis on practical experiences.

Clayton (1981:32) suggests three differences between outdoor education and environmental education: “Outdoor education is a method, environmental education a process. Outdoor education ... seeks ... to further the aims of existing disciplines; environmental education has diverse aims under the umbrella objective of environmental quality. Outdoor education relates exclusively to the outdoors; while environmental education is concerned with the total environment and may be pursued in any setting, indoor or outdoor, urban or rural”.

It appears that the ultimate goal of environmental education is to ensure sustainable living and development on planet Earth and it is not limited to the outdoors or one method to achieve this aim.

### **1.12.2.3 ADVENTURE EDUCATION**

Adventure education is concerned with the use of adventure-based activities, i.e. recreational pursuits in the outdoors, e.g. canoeing, and “artificial adventure environs”, e.g. ropes courses and group initiatives, to provide participants with challenging tasks to accomplish, requiring decision-making, team-work,

communication and trust (Priest, 1990a:114). These tasks contain an element of risk and danger, are entered into voluntarily by the participant and should be attractive to the participant. The ultimate goal is the personal growth and development of the participant (Priest, 1990a:114).

Adventure is courted because it enriches peoples' lives; it is exciting, fun, challenging, new, different from everyday life and extends the world (self) of the participant. It cannot automatically be accepted that mere participation in an adventure-based activity will lead to personal development. The adventure experience requires reflection and debriefing with the assistance of a trained leader to derive meaning from the process.

#### **1.12.2.4 ORGANIZED CAMPING**

“Organized camping” is the term widely used in the States to refer to what the American Camping Association (ACA, undated:1) defines as a “sustained experience which provides a creative, educational opportunity in group living in the outdoors. It utilizes trained leadership and the resources of the natural surroundings to contribute to each camper’s mental, physical, social and spiritual growth”.

The term “organized camping” was widely used before the terms “outdoor education” or “adventure education” became prevalent. Organized camping originated in the USA and Carlson (Ball & Ball, 1990:3) regards it as one of the unique contributions the USA made to the world. There are many different types of camps: day camps and residential camps, profit versus non-profit camps, and camps for special populations, e.g. persons with disabilities. The researcher regards organized camping as educational recreation, compared to adventure education, which is recreational education. Religious and other school camps are excellent examples of organized camping.

The researcher regards adventure-based programmes as a combination of elements from all of the above. For the purposes of the research an adventure-

based programme is defined as a **planned, programmatic** effort that utilizes **trained leadership** and the **resources of the natural environment** to offer **goal-orientated** adventure-based **activities**, usually conducted in **small groups** and based on **experiential learning in the outdoors**, to achieve **developmentally** appropriate learning **objectives**. In this research the adventure-based programme had to be a **residential** experience, i.e. offering overnight accommodation for at least one night to participants.

### **1.12.3 OUTDOOR LEADER**

Positive leadership is of the essence in any activity aimed at child and youth development, especially where high risk experiences are involved and the safety of participants must be ensured. Outdoor leadership requires many skills and personal qualities from the person facilitating adventure-based experiences. Priest (1990:211) defines the outdoor leader as “ someone who is designated, by the agency sponsoring the adventure, to be in charge of the adventure”.

The preparation and training of an outdoor leader is an ongoing process with the aim of acquiring knowledge and developing skills to successfully and safely lead outdoor pursuits (Green, 1990:217). There is no standard course or module for the preparation of outdoor leaders in South Africa; but it must also be said that no single course or degree programme can adequately prepare the outdoor leader for his task (Green, 1990: 218).

The skills outdoor leaders require are divided into two main categories referred to as “hard” and “soft” skills. The hard skills include environmental, safety, technical, and administration skills. Soft skills include social, psychological, communication and conceptual skills, i.e. judgement and creativity (Phipps & Swiderski, 1990:224).

The outdoor leader is a trained person, experienced in facilitating adventure-based activities to participants with the aim of personal development, and as such plays possibly the most critical role in any adventure-based programme.



#### **1.12.4 ADOLESCENCE**

Adolescence is a diverse developmental phase marking the transition of childhood to adulthood. The onset of adolescence is marked by the distinctive physical changes of puberty and is concluded with the individual displaying socially acceptable behaviour and skills associated with maturity (Singer & Hussey, 1995:140). Most researchers regard the chronological age of the adolescent to be between 12 and 18 years, and this developmental phase is often divided into early, middle and late adolescence (De Anda, 1995:16).

The life-span developmental model regards adolescence as the time to complete various developmental tasks: physical maturation, cognitive shift from concrete to formal operational thoughts, heightened emotional intensity and increased peer group importance. The central process during this phase is peer pressure and adolescents begin to experiment with high risk behaviours, e.g. drug and alcohol use. Adolescence is a time of transition and appears to be a “prime point for providing preventative and life-skills programs to children” (Moote & Wodarski, 1997:147).

Coughlan (1997:15-17) cautions against generalizations that do not take the social and cultural context of the individual into consideration. For instance “a Xhosa boy growing up in South Africa today must learn to live with and mediate the very different messages he is receiving from his cultural background and from the westernised society in which he is being educated and looking for work”.

The developmental characteristics of adolescents are discussed more specifically and in greater depth in point 2.3.2.

#### **1.12.5 YOUTH-AT-RISK**

The term “at-risk” originated in the medical field where characteristics common to people suffering from an illness enables doctors to prescribe preventative measures; e.g. a person with high cholesterol is considered at high risk for heart disease (O’Sullivan & Tennant; 1993:4).

The “at-risk” label is not intended to be another negative label for children and youth struggling to succeed. However, it does identify a wide range of children often described as disadvantaged, deprived, underachieving, marginal, low performing, alienated, and inferior (poor self-concept).

Behavioural indicators constitute a “simple and convenient tool“ to identify youth-at-risk (Coughlan, 1997:19). Characteristics of youth-at-risk were categorized by Wells (Moote & Wodarski, 1997:145) into four areas:

**Family:** low socio-economic status, mobility/change in schools, abuse.

**Individual:** poor attitude towards school, low achievement, attendance and truancy problems, low aspirations/goals, health problems, criminal delinquent behaviour, drug problems, and discipline problems in school.

**School:** low teacher expectations, lack of language instruction, cultural conflict between home and school, lack of counselling, poor facilities, inadequate curriculum, negative school environment, suspension, placement in special programmes, lower occupational aspirations, not reading at grade level.

**Family-related:** single parent home, more older siblings than friends, little solidarity with family, exposed to drop-out at home, lack of cultural and economic experiences related to success in traditional schools, low parental education and occupation, stress in the home, ineffective parenting.

The term “youth-at-risk” in this research study, refers to early adolescents between the ages of 12 to 18 years who experience difficulty succeeding in the environments (school, community, family) in which they live; failing to achieve developmental tasks within the normal cultural context.