The effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years

by

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MAGISTER SOCIALIS DILIGENTIAE
(PLAY THERAPY)

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FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

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DECLARATION

This work is the student’s own and the sources have been acknowledged as far as possible.

Keren Wedcliffe _____________________
26415268
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It is with praise and gratitude to G-d that this research study has come to fruition. I am grateful for the tools, skills and intellect that I have been blessed with to complete this study.

The respondents and literature defined role models as ‘people to look up to and emulate’. It is on this basis that I acknowledge a few of the role models who have enhanced my personal growth, nurtured my efficacy beliefs and assisted me in completing this mammoth task that is my masters mini-dissertation.

- I dedicate my study to my primary caregivers – my parents. They are true role models, exhibiting sterling character traits. They have lit my life path, taught me, raised me, loved me unconditionally and given me countless growth opportunities and most importantly given me the belief in myself. My sisters and I have had the honour of growing up beneath their wings. May G-d bless them with health, strength and the means to continue as beacons in my life.

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SUMMARY

The effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years

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The goal of the study was to explore the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years.

The focus of the study was on the middle childhood or school years, a critical developmental stage with a proliferation of socialization agents – role models. The researcher was interested in the effect that observational learning (modelling) had on the socialization of the child and more specifically on his/her developing self efficacy beliefs. The researcher identified the lack of relevant literature pertaining to children and relating to the South African context. The rapidly changing global environment and pervasive media exposure of modern living begged investigation regarding the effects on the child.

A qualitative approach was used in the study in gaining subjective, experiential rich data from the child’s perspective. A phenomenological research strategy was used as the researcher sought the meaning that the children attach to role models in their lived experience. Applied research characterized the research study. The researcher hoped to enhance the existing available data by adding insight in understanding the child’s subjective experiences, insight that would be of assistance to teachers, parents and helping professionals.
Unstructured one-on-one interviews were chosen as the **method of data collection**. Eight respondents, four boys and four girls, were selected through purposive, non-probability **sampling method** with the aim at eliciting relevant and rich data.

The **theory** of social learning proposed by Bandura (1963, 1986) formed the basis of the study. This theory underscores observational learning – both direct tuition and vicarious reinforcement – as the powerful vehicle of socialization of a child. Thus, role models are agents of observational learning; modelling attitudes, values, norms, beliefs and behaviours for ensuing emulation. Self efficacy beliefs are a self evaluation of the individual’s capabilities. These beliefs fuel action since an individual will act and achieve success in accordance with this evaluation.

The **findings** of the study highlighted the effect of significant relationships, role models, on the efficacy beliefs of the child. Peer feedback, acknowledgment and vicarious reinforcement provided by peer relationships was seen as influential in colouring the efficacy beliefs of the respondents. Teacher efficacy was seen as an important factor influencing future learning and the child’s academic success.

A relationship that was seen to hold great significance was the parent-child relationship. Parent reaction to the child’s achievement – their praise, motivation and validation – was a crucial factor impacting the efficacy beliefs of the child. The researcher found a general lack of awareness of media influences.

Role models are selected, observed, evaluated and integrated by the child as an active member of his/her social world. In **conclusion**, role models were seen as key figures in the developing efficacy beliefs of the child. Self efficacy beliefs govern the achievement and success of the child. These beliefs are a learned self evaluation. The study highlighted that not all role models have the same significance for the child, hold the same influence. Moreover, observational learning is both direct and indirect, including negative and positive models.
KEY CONCEPTS

Children

Middle Childhood

Social Learning Theory

Observational Learning

Social Environment

Role Models

Peers

Teachers

Parents

Media
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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years

1.1. Introduction

The primary socializing agents of the child are usually the parents. This changes as the young child enters the middle childhood years. The school environment provides a platform for further socialization. Peer relationships and the social group is a source for learning the behaviour, norms and beliefs that society espouses. The teacher-student relationship is also very important in the child’s development and socialization. These formative years of schooling aid in shaping the child’s enduring personality (Louw, Van Ede, Ferns, Schoeman & Wait, 1998:322).

Learning theorists propose that children learn how to act through the modelling of behaviours (Bee & Boyd, 2004:250). ‘Role models are one source through which children and adolescents acquire attitudes, values, and patterns of conduct’ (Anderson, Huston, Schmitt, Linebarger & Wright, 2001:108). An interesting finding regarding the process of modelling is that modelling is more effective than preaching (Bee & Boyd, 2004:250). This adds value to the role of socializing agent or role model.

Today, children of all ages are bombarded with mass media that offers ‘… a host of potential models who appear to be attractive, powerful, and glamorous’ (Anderson et al., 2001:108). Mass media is a very important source for the modelling of behaviour. Values, norms and beliefs are communicated through this medium. The child is forced to decide between the rejection or integration of these messages (Durkin, 1995:176-178).

As the child gains independence, the power of the parent as primary role model diminishes. This is especially true in adolescence. It is suggested that the external
environment becomes increasingly important as a source of the values and behaviour to be emulated by the developing child (Anderson et al., 2001:108).

During middle childhood, the child’s self concept or self identity (who he/she is) becomes highly differentiated. ‘Advancing cognitive and linguistic abilities mean that children are able to understand and use a broad array of concepts and terms to describe themselves and other people’ (Durkin, 1995:295). The child has an increased ‘… ability to understand how other people view them’ (Ashford, Lecroy & Lortie, 2001:317). Social comparison is enabled during the school years which results in a more individualized self concept (Ashford et al., 2001:317).

Self efficacy is ‘… a person’s evaluation of his or her ability or competency to perform a task, reach a goal, or overcome an obstacle’ (Bandura in Baron & Byrne, 1997:172). Self efficacy is a form of self evaluation or expectation of self. The present study seeks to explore the effect of modelling in social learning on the self efficacy of the child in middle childhood. The emphasis on the ‘school years’ presents a critical developmental stage with a proliferation of socialization agents, role models. ‘Schooling highlights others’ expectations about how the individual should develop’ (Durkin, 1995:295).

The developing importance of peer relationships in the middle childhood has great value since ‘[i]t is in peer relationships that they broaden and particularize knowledge of their capabilities … vast amount of social learning occurs among peers’ (Bandura, 1997a:173). Efficacy beliefs regarding capability play an important part in children’s achievement. ‘Children who believe they can exercise some control over their own learning and mastery of schoolwork achieve success in their academic pursuits’ (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara & Pastorelli, 1996:1217). Efficacy beliefs ‘… regulate aspirations, choice of behavioral courses, mobilization and maintenance of effort, and affective reactions’ (Bandura, 1997a:4).

The child must gain self knowledge of his/her capabilities in broadening areas of functioning as he/she expands his/her transactions with the environment (Bandura, 1997a:168). Owing to the influence and power of efficacy beliefs, the researcher was interested in the effect of environmental modelling on these developing beliefs.
The value of such a study on master’s level is that it serves as a preliminary study in researching the effect of role models and social learning within the South African context (Feinberg, 2006). Feinberg (2006), an experienced psychologist and remedial teacher, stated that South Africa presents a multiracial, diverse population which is an untapped reservoir of knowledge. This study was the first step in tapping into this rich source and contributed to furthering research in the field of social learning in South Africa.

The study was significant in adding insight into the many influences that affect children’s behaviour, beliefs and norms within the South African context. The researcher has noted the lack of research relating to the South African context with specific reference to the child in middle childhood. The researcher was interested in the effects and the nature of the integration of social learning modelling on the child’s efficacy beliefs.

### 1.2. Problem Formulation

Research studies have been undertaken to assess the effect of role models on the adolescent (Anderson et al., 2001; Zirkel, 2002). Anderson et al. (2001:108) studied the relationship between media exposure and the self image of the adolescent, with specific reference to body image and role model choice.

Regarding self efficacy, older studies (Gould & Weiss, 1981; Tuckman & Sexton, 1990) have been conducted to prove that ‘[p]erformance in both physical and academic tasks is enhanced by the appropriate type of self efficacy’ (Baron & Byrne, 1997:173). Baron and Byrne (1997:173) conclude that ‘[e]xpectations of poor performance are associated with expectations of a negative self evaluation and impaired performance.’ The results of these studies provide valuable insight, however, these studies involved older participants and not children.

The present study focused on the child in middle childhood, the ‘school child’. Research done by Madon, Jussim and Eccles (1997) ‘… supports the theory that teachers’ beliefs in students’ abilities influence their performance’ (Ashford et al., 2001:335). However, underestimating the child's potential by the teacher was seen to
have a marginal effect on his/her test scores (Ashford et al., 2001:335). Regarding the child's self efficacy, research by Seligman (1995) proposes that ‘…children can be taught to attribute their failures to insufficient effort rather than lack of ability…’, which enhances their self efficacy and children ‘… learn to persist in spite of failure’ (Ashford et al., 2001:336).

The increasing media influences in the global context are affecting the developing world. The researcher is aware that it is not only parents and teachers that are effecting children’s self evaluation, self efficacy. Zirkel (2002: 358) states that ‘… young people pursue only that which they can imagine as possible.’ Thus it is the modelling of behaviour and goal attainment that motivates the youth’s sense of opportunity.

Technology, media influences, the changes in the educational system and family structure, attest to the changes and advancement in the social landscape. Bandura (1997a:vii) states that the wrenching social transformations ‘… are not new over the course of history, but what is new is their magnitude and accelerated pace … [t]hese challenging realities place a premium on people’s sense of efficacy to shape their future.’ It is clear that role models and social learning provide an individual with powerful lessons and feedback that influences self identity. Social learning opportunities are changing and this leads to many challenges, specifically in the realm of social learning.

Durkin (1995:25) based on Bandura (1986) defines self efficacy as referring to ‘… the individual’s belief that he or she can exercise some control over events that influence his or her life.’ The rapid change that is evident in South Africa is owing, in part, to globalization. ‘The globalization of human interconnectedness presents new challenges for people to exercise some control over their personal destinies and national life’ (Bandura, 1997a:vii). Globalization has brought global influences, changes and global problems into South African society.

One of the global influences that has proliferated South African society is that of the media. The media is a very successful method of social learning. ‘Fictional dramatic presentations in the broadcast media provide another means of enabling people to
achieve changes that have widespread social impact’ (Bandura, 1997a:505). Unfortunately the changes modelled are not always desirable, positive or appropriate lessons for children. Feinberg (2006) stresses that what children see in the media is not always moral or ethical and can be violent. Children are not taught to discern between desirable and undesirable behaviours that are modelled to them. Feinberg (2006) has seen in practice that children learn most from their immediate family and it is the breakdown and disruption of the family structure that results in children adopting dysfunctional role models.

Globalization has brought change in every sphere of society. Globalization is ‘… the process whereby political, social, economic and cultural relations increasingly take on a global scale, and which has profound consequences for individuals’ local experiences and everyday lives’ (Bilton, Bonnet, Jones, Lawson, Skinner, Stanworth & Webster, 2002: 46). Thus, children’s social learning experiences, the role models they are exposed to, have also been transformed.

Bandura (1997a:viii) states that the growth of knowledge and technology has ‘… enhanced the human power to transform environments. People are increasingly adapting the environment to themselves rather than just adapting themselves to the environment.’

It is evident that global transformation has affected the child in middle childhood in the changed social learning opportunities provided by the role models in the child’s life. The social environment, the media, peer pressure, academic expectations and the family structure are a few of the factors that provide a spectrum of role models affecting the child and specifically the efficacy beliefs of the child. The question remains whether children have control over ‘adapting the environment to themselves’ and to what extent they may be ‘adapting themselves to the environment’ (Bandura, 1997a:viii). Self efficacy is a powerful self evaluation of the extent of control that an individual wields over his/her environment. Self efficacy is learned from the dynamic social and now, global environment of the child.

The type of efficacy beliefs held by a child correlate significantly with the performance of that child. The motivation and goal attainment of the child are based
on his/her self evaluation and sense of possibility. Social learning colours and moulds the norms, values and behaviour of the child. It is evident that this process of modelling and learning has been greatly affected by the many changes in the social environment of the ‘school child’ growing up in South Africa today. The dynamic social landscape includes a proliferation of global influences affecting the social learning opportunities of that child. It is the nature of these changes and the effect on child in middle childhood that was of interest in this study.

1.3. The Goal and Objectives of the Study

The purpose is defined as the ‘… desired effect: the goal or intended outcome of something.’ The term aim is closely linked to this definition and is defined as ‘… something that somebody wants to achieve’ (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2004). Fouché (2002a:107) notes that the terms aim, purpose and goal are frequently used interchangeably, referring to the broad ‘dream’ that an individual works toward achieving.

The goal of this study was to explore the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years. Exploratory research is undertaken to gain insight into a phenomenon, situation, community or individual (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:44).

The objectives are the ‘… steps that one has to take … realistically at grass-roots level, within a certain time-span, in order to attain the dream’ (Fouché, 2002a:107-108). These steps are measurable, more concrete and speedily attainable “ends” (Fouché, 2002a:107).

The following objectives served to achieve the goal of exploration:

- To describe ‘role models’ (according to social learning), ‘self efficacy’ and the ‘child in middle childhood’ in order to obtain a theoretical frame of reference in understanding the effect of role models on the self efficacy of children in middle childhood.
- To conduct a qualitative study to investigate the nature and effect of role models on children’s lives and especially on their self efficacy beliefs. To generate research findings that will be relevant to the modern South African context.

- To draw conclusions and make recommendations in order to promote awareness of role models on the self efficacy of children in middle childhood, amongst parents and professionals who work with children.

1.4. The Research Question

The research question is ‘… a tentative formulation on a first level of thought’ (Fouché & Delport, 2002a:87). The aim of the study was exploratory, to gain rich individualized data regarding an unexplored field (Fouché, 2002a:109). The exploratory aim is what fashions the research question. The research question is therefore based on the research problem or area of interest and reduces the problem for it to be handled in a single study (Bless & Higson-Smith, 2000:17). The research question should be precise and specific. It must also be researchable, relevant, feasible and ethically sound (Williams, Tutty & Grinell, 1995:88).

The research question for this study was : What is the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in middle childhood?

1.5. Research Approach

The approach chosen for this study was the qualitative approach. Babbie and Mouton (1998:270) state that the ‘… primary goal of studies using this approach is defined as describing and understanding rather than explaining human behaviour …[Q]ualitative researchers attempt always to study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves.’ Thus, the aim of such idiographic studies is ‘… to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life’ (Fouché & Delport, 2002a:79). The product is ‘… descriptive data in the participant’s own written or spoken words’ (Fouché & Delport, 2002a:79). Rich, subjective data is yielded which
provides ‘… a subjective exploration of reality from the perspective of an insider …’ (Fouché & Delport, 2002a:79).

Marshall and Rossman (1999:46) provide guidelines on situations which would warrant a qualitative approach. One situation is where the research will delve in-depth into processes and complexities and where the relevant variables have not been identified yet (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:46). The present research sought to provide insight into a relatively unexplored phenomenon. The desired product was subjective, experiential data that would be from the perspective of the child.

It was more appropriate to use a qualitative method with the children in this study rather than a quantitative method. This method allowed the researcher to achieve rapport with the children and gain a deeper understanding of the sample. The qualitative approach was more flexible and open. It allowed the researcher to identify the participants’ values and beliefs that underlie the phenomenon of interest (Fouché & Delport, 2002a:79).

Ultimately, the researcher was able to explore the topic, bring herself into the study and tell the story from the participant’s point of view rather than as an objective outsider (Creswell, 1998:16). Thus, qualitative studies provide description and understanding of a phenomenon, which was desired for this study (Babbie & Mouton, 1998:271).

1.6. Type of Research

There are two main types of research, namely: basic and applied. Basic research ‘… provides a foundation for knowledge and understanding’ (Fouché, 2002a:108). This type of research aims at the development or refining of theory. Marlow and Boone (2005:331) state that applied research ‘… produces practical outcomes and is directed at solving problems encountered in social work practice.’ Thus, there are practical implications for such findings. These types do overlap since theoretical results often also have practical implications (Fouché, 2002a:108-109).
The present research study had the main objective of exploratory research. Fouché (2002a:109) states that the reason such research is undertaken is that there is a lack of information on a new subject area or to become better acquainted with a situation in order to formulate a problem/hypothesis. In the case of this study, there was a lack of information on this particular area of the subject, namely, the effect of role models on the child in middle childhood. Data already existed regarding the modelling of behaviour by children relating to the learning theories. This study sought to enhance the existing available data by adding insight into understanding the child’s subjective experiences.

The research was that of applied research because the study concentrated on a phenomenon existing in reality. The applied research study sought to benefit the specific ‘client system’ (Williams et al., 1995:52). The insight provided by the research results had practical implications owing to the enhanced understanding of children in this specific developmental period of middle childhood.

1.7. Research Design and Methodology

1.7.1. Research Design

The research design in a qualitative context is ‘… the entire process of research from conceptualizing a problem, to writing the narrative …’ (Creswell, 1998:2). The term strategy is often employed when discussing a qualitative ‘design’. This strategy is the overall plan through which the research question will be answered. The qualitative research strategy is flexible and ‘… does not usually provide the researcher with a step-by-step plan or a fixed recipe to follow’ (Creswell, 1998:2).

The research strategy best suited for this study, was phenomenology. The aim being ‘… to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives … the product of the research is a description of the essence of the experiences being studied’ (Fouché, 2002b:273). Role models have a constant influence on children’s perceptions of themselves and their self efficacy. This influences children’s social lives and the meaning that they attach to their everyday experiences. The study, therefore, aimed to understand how primary school children experience role models in
their lives. Phenomenologists are concerned with the people’s experience of phenomena rather than a description of phenomena which exist independently of the people’s experiences of them.

A rich narrative was desirable in order to provide insight into the meaning that the children attach to the experience of modelling and how this affects the children’s self efficacy. ‘[P]henomenologists are concerned with understanding social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved’ (Welman, Kruger & Mitchell, 2005:192). In order to achieve this, data was collected and the inherent themes and descriptions analysed. This process will be described in detail below.

1.7.2. Data Collection

The data collection method is chosen according to the purpose of the research (Greeff, 2002:291). The method used in this study was that of the unstructured one-on-one or in-depth interview (Greeff, 2002:298). The specific purpose of phenomenological interviewing ‘… is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share’ (Marshall & Rossman, 1999:108). Tutty, Rothery and Grinnell (1996:55) state that the unstructured interview is considered the best way of gaining understanding of the perceptions held by people.

Use of the unstructured approach follows two assumptions. The first assumption is that ‘… they (the researchers) may not know in advance what all the necessary questions might be… [t]hey also assume that not all interviewees will find equal meaning in like-worded standardized questions’ (Tutty et al., 1996:55).

The specific planning decisions that allow for data collection are related to the five steps in the qualitative interview mentioned by Tutty et al. (1996:60). These steps are the following:

- Prepare the interview
- Choose a recording method
- Conduct the interview
- Reflect about the interview
- Complete the interview data gathering process

1.7.2.1. Preparing the Interview

The target population of interest was primary school children. The purpose of the study has been stated above. Permission from the specific school (refer to Addendum A) and consent from the parents and participants (refer to Addendum B & C) was needed in preparing the interview. Recruitment of participants took place within the school setting in collaboration with the principal and the delegated class teacher. Approximately eight participants were selected, four boys and four girls. The children were from the same grade so that their verbal and intellectual ability would be on a similar level.

The number of participants was approximate since interviewing would progress until saturation of information was achieved. An indication that saturation point has been reached is when there is repetition in the data gained (Greeff, 2002:312). There should also be sufficient numbers to be a reflection of the actual population ‘… so that others outside the sample might have a chance to connect to the experience of those in it’ (Greeff, 2002:300).

Regarding the recruitment of participants, the usual practice is to over-recruit by 20% in order to compensate for participants who do not show up (Babbie & Mouton, 1998:292). The issue of ‘no-shows’ was not so critical for this study since it was to take place within an organized school system and absenteeism was reported.

The unstructured interview seeks to obtain rich, subjective data and really “get inside the participant’s skin” (Greeff, 2002:301). Collins (1998:3,5) refers to interviews as social interactions. It is the relationship between the participant and the researcher that forms this interaction. The relationship is jointly constructed, fluid and changing (Greeff, 2002:299). ‘[T]he questions emerge from the interactive process between the interviewer and interviewee’ (Tutty et al., 1996:55). Thus, preparing the interview included preparing the questions that would facilitate this interaction.
The questions in an unstructured interview should be focused and prepared in order to elicit relevant information. However, there is flexibility in questioning, the researcher ‘…must develop, adapt, and generate questions appropriate to a given situation and the central purpose of your (the researcher’s) study’ (Tutty et al., 1996:55). The two questions that have preliminarily been prepared for this study were used as a guideline in the interview. The questions were open-ended to invite discussion.

The setting of the interview was prepared in advance. The time, place and prior written consent was organized. The environment should be quiet, with no interruptions, comfortable and non-threatening (Greeff, 2002:300). Conducting the interviews in the school provided a familiar setting for the participants and classrooms as available venues.

The estimated timeline was important in planning for the data collection. The empirical study was undertaken once permission to proceed had been granted from the Faculty of Humanities of the University of Pretoria. The empirical study was to be implemented during the months of May and June, 2007. The literature control was to be completed during the months of June and July, 2007. The finalizing of the empirical chapter and the conclusions of the study were completed during August and September, 2007.

1.7.2.2. Choosing a Recording Method

It is evident from above that the researcher took an active role as the interviewer during the session. In order to capture the data for analysis, tape recording and field notes were to be used. It was essential to ask the participant’s permission before recording the session. The researcher was to take notes after the session. These notes included the non verbal communication that cannot be captured on audio tape. Two audio tapes were used during the session to record the discussion and ensure ‘continued data capturing’ (Greeff, 2002:304). The reason for using two recorders was that it is impossible to reconstruct a discussion without a verbatim record. The field notes augmented the audio tapes and also allowed the researcher to record initial themes that were striking (Greeff, 2002:317-318).
The researcher transcribed the audio tapes into written format as soon as possible after the session. These transcripts, together with the field notes and memory of the session, formed the data for analysis (Greeff, 2002:318).

1.7.2.3. Conducting the Interview

The unstructured interview is seen as “a conversation with a purpose” (Greeff, 2002:298). ‘Interviewees will be most comfortable and fluent using their normal language mode and must be made to feel that its use is not only legitimate but welcome and valued’ (Coolican, 2004:156). The role assumed by the researcher in this study was neither detached nor objective, but rather engaged (Greeff, 2002: 299). Establishing rapport with the respondents was essential for successful self-disclosure. The researcher does this ‘… by attentive listening, showing interest, understanding and respect for what the participant says’ (Greeff, 2002:301).

It is clear that ‘… the quality of the interview depends mainly on the skills of the researcher as interviewer’ (Greeff, 2004:292). Westcott and Littleton (2005:151) state that positive rapport is essential throughout the interview ‘… so that the child is empowered rather than merely subjected to a list of commands or instructions.’ Henning, Van Rensburg and Smit (2004:58) state that the ‘… beginnings of interviews are often indicative of the friendly and engaging invitation of the speaker to share …’

The researcher began by making the participant feel at ease. This included confirming ‘… the general purpose of the research, the role that the interview plays in the research, the approximate time required, and the fact that the information will be treated confidentially’ (Greeff, 2002:301). The interview started off with a ‘friendly non-threatening chat’. The information elicited from the participant was to begin as descriptive and progress to feelings and reactions (Coolican, 2004:159).

‘In semi-structured and unstructured interviews, the researcher can follow-up relevant lines by asking subjects to elaborate on their response. Consequently more detailed information can be collected… the interviewer has the freedom to explore any topic as it arises’ (Drummond, 1996:62,59). The researcher used prompts and probes to this
end. Prompts are supplementary questions, probes ‘… are more general requests for further information’ (Coolican, 2004:159). It is the job of the interviewer ‘… to guide the interviewee to the topics that relate to your study’ (Tutty et al., 1996:72). Thus, interview techniques were utilized.

The interview process was exhausting for the interviewer and the interviewee. The researcher/interviewer must be attuned to the non verbal communication of the participant/interviewee. Thus, the interview should ‘wind down’ when valuable information had been gathered and also when the participant is losing concentration. At the close of the interview the interviewer summarised the main points, asked for any questions and thanked the participant for his/her valuable time and contribution (Greeff, 2002:301-302).

1.7.2.4. Reflecting about the Interview

Greeff (2002:301) states that the most fundamental skill that a researcher needs to develop is ‘… the ability to analyse an interview while participating in it.’ This is a reflection on the content and the process of the interview. The content is ‘… what the participant is saying …’ and the process is ‘… how the participant talks and behaves during the interview’ (Greeff, 2002:296). Field notes recorded by the researcher after the interview were to provide guidelines for further data analysis. These notes included ‘… a written account of the things the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks about in the course of the interviewing’ (Greeff, 2002:304).

1.7.2.5. Completing the Interviewing Data Gathering Process

The interviewing process ends when the researcher decides that enough data has been gathered and that saturation point has been reached. Transcribing and analysis of the data then proceeds, as will be described below. The researcher transcribed the audio tapes into written format as soon as possible after each interview. These transcripts, together with the field notes and memory of the session, formed the data for analysis (Greeff, 2002:318). A literature control was to be conducted once the data had been gathered and analysed. A phenomenological study seeks to understand people’s lived
experience and subjective perceptions, and only afterwards to relate these findings to an existing body of knowledge (Fouché & Delport, 2002b:268).

1.7.3. **Data Analysis**

Krueger and Casey (2000:127) state that the intensity and the depth of analysis are determined by the purpose of the actual study. In this study, the purpose of the study was to provide insight and understanding into the subjective experiences of primary school children regarding the role models in their lives. Qualitative research strives ‘… to be open to the reality of others … to tell someone else’s story, but (we) must listen before we can understand’ (Greeff, 2002:318).

The aim of analysis is to look for patterns and trends that reappear within a single interview or among various interviews (Greeff, 2002:318). When analysing, the researcher considered the words said, the internal consistency, the context, the frequency, extensiveness and specificity of comments, what was not said and in addition the researcher was to find the “big idea” or theme (Morgan & Krueger, 1998:31).

Creswell (1998:142-165) presents the data analysis as a spiral which includes the following tasks:

- collecting and recording data
- managing data
- reading and memoing
- describing, classifying and interpreting
- representing and visualising.

The first two tasks have already been discussed above. It is important to note that the organization of the data is very important in the analysis process. In order to become intimately familiar with the data, the researcher had to keep re-reading the transcripts. The writing of notes and memos in the margins helped in the coding process. Classifying involves the coding process where the data is taken apart in order to identify themes, categories or dimensions of information. ‘As categories of meaning
emerge, the researcher searches for those that have internal convergence and external divergence’ (De Vos, 2002:344). The rest of the data was then organized under these headings or main themes.

Open coding procedures were used in this study, which ‘… pertains to the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data’ (De Vos, 2002:346). The coding process involved making comparisons and asking questions. The first step was recognizing themes, which is the breaking down of the information and conceptualizing the data. The data concepts were then grouped into categories that pertain to common phenomena, thus categorising and organizing the data. The categories were given a broad, descriptive and abstract name (De Vos, 2002:346-347).

The researcher then developed the categories and began to do so in terms of the properties that could be dimensionalised, which means that these properties could be placed along a continuum. Open coding may be done by analysing each line of the data, each paragraph or the entire interview as a whole, in order to identify categories (De Vos, 2002: 347-348).

The categories or themes identified in the data were compared with the themes identified by the literature. The literature was integrated in the description and interpretation of the data gathered in the interviews. The research findings and thorough analysis was to be presented in the form of a mini-dissertation. The results were also made available to the school from which the sample was taken.

1.8. Pilot Study

The pilot study is useful in highlighting the limitations and strengths of the research study (Strydom, 2005:206). The qualitative pilot study is mostly informal. The aim is to ascertain certain trends, clarify uncertainties and estimate the duration and expenses for the actual study (Strydom & Delport, 2002:337).

The researcher has the opportunity to test the interview, make the necessary modifications and improve the quality of the actual interview (Strydom & Delport, 2002:337). Another benefit of the pilot study is in establishing relationships with
respondents and obtaining permission for the implementation of the actual study (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 1998:93). Relevant aspects of the pilot study will be discussed below.

1.8.1. Testing of the Data Collection Instrument

Seidman (1998:32) stresses the importance of testing the interviewing design. The researcher, thus, has the opportunity to grasp ‘… some of the practical aspects of establishing access, making contact and conducting the interview, as well as become alert to their own level of interviewing skills’ (Greeff, 2002:300). Greeff (2002:299) states that at the start of each new study, ‘there is considerable trial and error in early interviews as the wording and ordering of questions in a particular area of interest are literally field-tested with participants.’

Open-questions are used in an unstructured interview with the goal of getting ‘… the person to express his ideas about particular issues’ (Greeff, 2002:301). The data gathered in the interviews must relate to the ‘… specific questions that the researcher seeks to answer’ (Greeff, 2002:299).

Greeff (2002:299) states that the prepared questions should be reviewed through consultation. The researcher consulted with the class teacher of the participants in order to gauge the children’s developmental level and the appropriateness of the questions. It was important that the questions be worded in a clear and concise fashion. The researcher consulted with experts in qualitative research. These experts provided valuable feedback regarding the researcher’s planning, attention to technical details and the quality of the prepared questions.

Coolican (2004:158) states that ‘[i]nterviews can be made more effective with thoughtful preparation and by practicing with colleagues as dummy interviewees until stumbling points and awkwardness have been reduced or ironed out.’ A potential participant was asked for her understanding of the questions formulated for the interview. This allowed the researcher to refine and reword the questions for added clarity. This child was not included in the actual study.
1.8.2. Feasibility of the Study

The sample was taken from a private primary school. The researcher was familiar with many of the teachers in the school which ensured administrative co-operation. The principal was asked for written consent in order for the research process to proceed (refer to Addendum A).

A school provided an existing and organized target population. The interviews could be conducted within an existing physical training/library lesson framework. Therefore, the children’s school studies would not be unnecessarily disrupted. The school day also provided an existing timetable in which to work. There were existing extra curricular activities in the primary school and therefore the children (and the parents fetching them) were not inconvenienced if the session were to take place after school.

Conducting the interviews in a school meant that there were classrooms that could be used as venues. The familiar classrooms provide a ‘… comfortable, non-threatening setting… ’ for the children (Greeff, 2002: 317). The children were also in the vicinity of the venue and transport expenses were not an obstacle to attendance.

The co-operation of the teachers and principal helped in the recruitment of participants. Thus the researcher/facilitator had support in this pursuit. The teachers also empowered and encouraged the children to attend.

Permission from the parents was obtained by sending a form home with the children that needed to be completed and returned the next day (refer to Addendum B). There was also a contact number for the researcher on the form so that the parents could voice any concerns.

A primary school was a very feasible setting for the implementation of this research study. There were many existing structures in place that facilitated the data collection process.
1.9. Research Population, Sample and Sampling Method

1.9.1. Description of the Population and the Sample

The universe refers to ‘… all potential subjects who possess the attributes in which the researcher is interested’ (Strydom & Venter, 2002:198). The universe of this study was all children in South Africa that were in middle childhood. The population is the sampling frame (McBurney in Strydom & Venter, 2002:199). It is ‘… the totality of persons, events, organisation units … with which the research problem is concerned’ (Strydom & Venter, 2002:199). The specific population in this case was primary school children in middle childhood from the specific school from which the researcher drew the sample. Thus, the population was the context of the specific sample.

A sample is a small representation of the population. ‘[C]omplete coverage of the total population is seldom possible … one may not have sufficient time or resources to do the job’ (Strydom & Venter, 2002:199). The population for this study was too large to be studied. Qualitative research is very time-consuming and the data yielded is large. Therefore, a small sample of the population was to be used.

The school chosen by the researcher was a private day school. In order to respect the anonymity of the school, the name of the school will be withheld. The majority of children in the school came from middle class families. The primary school was co-ed which means that the boys and girls were combined in each class. There were approximately 49 children in grade 6, consisting of 2 classes. The most senior class in the primary school was grade 6. There was a separate boys and girls high school on the same campus.

1.9.2. The Sampling Method

Non-probability sampling methods are used in qualitative studies. The researcher sought individuals, groups and settings where the specific process being studied was most likely to occur (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:370). The sampling method employed was that of purposive sampling because ‘… it illustrates some feature or process that
is of interest for a particular study’ (Strydom & Delport, 2002:334). Creswell (1998:118) states that ‘… the purposeful selection of participants represents a key decision point in a qualitative study. Researchers designing qualitative studies need clear criteria in mind and need to provide rationales for their decisions.’

The criteria for the sample were the following:

- All respondents must be aged between 11 and 13 years old.
- Respondents must have necessary verbal skills for participation in the interview.
- The sample must consist of respondents from across the academic spectrum.
- The inclusion of uncooperative children or children with serious behavioural problems should be avoided.

The criteria for the purposive sample were that all the respondents should be aged between 11 and 13 years old, this is the upper range of the middle childhood years. This age was chosen because children of this age have more developed verbal skills, compared to younger children, and this was necessary for effective participation. This is also the pre-teen age which allowed for the comparison of the results with the literature regarding teenagers and role models. The sample also represented varied academic performance.

Eight participants who met the above criteria were chosen for the study. This included 4 boys and 4 girls. The teacher and the school psychologist assisted in identifying potential participants. Uncooperative children were to be avoided as they would disrupt the discussion (Babbie & Mouton, 1998:292).

1.10. Ethical Issues

‘Ethics is a set of moral principles… widely accepted,… (that) offer rules and behavioural expectations about the most correct conduct towards experimental subjects and respondents, employers, sponsors, other researchers, assistants and students’ (Strydom, 2002:63). This study aimed at gaining an understanding of the sample’s subjective experiences, thoughts and feelings. In order to do this, self-
disclosure from participants was necessary. There were ethical issues needing consideration in order to respect the participants and for the implementation of the research study to be actualized in a responsible manner.

1.10.1. Harm to Participants and Debriefing

Prior to implementation, the respondents were to be informed regarding the potential impact the study may have (Strydom, 2002:64). The respondents must be aware that the information desired was of a personal nature. The researcher should be aware of the potential harm that might be caused by the study. ‘Subjects may be harmed in a physical and/or emotional manner’, thus care should be taken to protect participants and prevent unnecessary harm (Strydom, 2002:64).

The research study focused on the nature and effect of role models on the respondents. The data obtained was highly individualized and subjective. Therefore, the exact nature of such data could not be anticipated and the consequent effect of the self-disclosure on the respondents. The process of gaining insight and rich data heightened respondents’ awareness of their own lives and the presence or absence of adequate role models. This insight and awareness could have caused unintended distress.

The potential harm that may be incurred was mentioned in the parental and participant consent form (refer to Addendum B & C). The provision of debriefing services was also included in the form. The responsibility of the researcher was highlighted in order that the parents indemnify the participants against any unforeseen harm that may occur. This is a legal requirement which does protect the researcher but does not absolve the researcher of the ethical responsibility ‘… to change the nature of his research rather than expose his respondents to the faintest possibility of physical and/or emotional harm of which he may be aware’ (Strydom, 2002:64-65).

Debriefing was provided after sessions. As mentioned above, many underlying personal issues may be unearthed during the process of the data collection. It was the researcher’s responsibility to assist the children, through possible referral, in dealing with any emotional or psychological issues that may arise. This would also deal with
any harm that may have inadvertently been caused. If emotional harm would occur, the children were to be referred to the school psychologist who is employed on a full time basis. An arrangement to this effect was already in place.

Salkind (2000:38) states that the easiest method for debriefing is to discuss the feelings of the participants immediately following the interview and then to send out a newsletter with a summary of the results of the study. Strydom (2002:73) stresses the importance of rectifying ‘… any misconceptions that may have arisen in the minds of the participants.’

There is an added aspect in qualitative studies ‘… that subjects benefit and get involved in the therapy or research to such an extent that they may suffer harm on completion of the programme’ (Strydom, 2002:65). Although the study consisted only of one interview per participant, it was important that closure be facilitated with sensitivity. Personal information and opinion was elicited during the sessions. The sharing of such information created a sensitivity between the participant and the researcher. A debriefing session was beneficial as a follow up for the participants to aid with closure and termination.

1.10.2. Informed Consent

Informed consent is a necessary condition for the research study (Hakim, 2000:143). The respondents were to be fully aware of what the study would entail and expect of them. This allowed them to withdraw their participation if they wished. When conducting research within a school setting the first consent was obtained from the principal (refer to Addendum A).

The parents were also informed of the study and given the choice of withdrawing their child as a potential participant. The parents signed a consent form (refer to Addendum B) that gave their child permission to participate in the study. The purpose, aim, goals and methods of the study were clearly expressed so that the school and the parents were able to make an informed decision (Strydom, 2002:65). The researcher used a consent form that included concise details of the study. As stated above, the
researcher also provided her contact details should parents have needed additional information.

The potential participants were also clearly informed of the details of the study (refer to Addendum C). Seeking the consent of the children communicated that the researcher valued their opinion and held the children in high regard. This was important for the data collection process. They should also have felt fully prepared for what was expected of them during the study and what to expect when the implementation commenced. Deception of respondents is both unethical and disrespectful (Strydom, 2002:65-66).

1.10.3. Anonymity and Confidentiality

One of the worries of potential participants is that of their anonymity. The participants needed to be assured of the confidentiality of the information gathered and the fact that their identities would not be used in the research report. Such assurances ensured open and flowing communication during the interview. The sensitive nature of subjective information also required greater sensitivity from the researcher.

Participants of this age are especially sensitive to peer pressure and adept at peer comparison. Therefore, they would be wary of self-disclosure. The participants were told that only the researcher would be aware of their identities. The research findings do not reflect the names or identifying characteristics of the actual participants (Strydom, 2002:67).

The issue of anonymity also applied to the school. This was respected by referring to the school rather as ‘a certain private primary school.’ The school and participants were to be consulted regarding the level of anonymity they wanted maintained.

1.10.4. Actions and Competence of the Researcher

Another ethical issue is that of the competence of the researcher. The researcher needed to be ‘… competent and adequately skilled to undertake the proposed
investigation … (especially when) sensitive investigations are involved …’ (Strydom, 2002:69).

It was stated above that conducting an unstructured interview required specific skills. The interviewer needed to be adept in communication and interviewing techniques. The importance of these skills was that they determined the nature and quality of the data yielded. The participants also needed to feel confident in the knowledge that the researcher/interviewer was qualified to conduct the research. The communication skills aided in creating a warm, open environment for participant’s self-disclosure.

The researcher is a qualified social worker registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions. This qualification together with the completion of the theoretical and practical components of the MSD (Play Therapy) degree ensured the necessary skills and experience needed for the successful implementation of the study.

A social worker registered with the South African Council for Social Service Professions is committed and bound to ethical conduct and practice. The researcher needed to conduct the study under the supervision of a supervisor from the University of Pretoria. The University was also the first station of consent beginning the research process.

1.10.5. Release or Publication of the Findings

The research results were to be released in the form of a mini-dissertation. This should be made available through the Academic Information Centre at the University of Pretoria. ‘Participation in a research project should be a learning experience for all concerned’ (Strydom, 2002:72). Making a simple summary report available to the respondents was important in ensuring that learning takes place and insight is gained. ‘It is not only the researcher who can gain more knowledge about the phenomenon, but also the subjects about themselves’ (Strydom, 2002:72).

A manuscript consisting of a summary of the literature, method and findings will be submitted to a scientific social work journal for possible publication. ‘Findings should be released in such a manner that utilisation by others is encouraged, since that after
all, is what the ultimate goal of any research project is’ (Strydom, 2002:72). The findings were presented clearly and objectively, ‘[s]hortcomings and errors must be admitted’ (Strydom, 2002:72). This allows others to learn from the study - from both the strengths and weaknesses.

1.11. Limitations of the Study

The researcher was very grateful not to have experienced many limitations. Certain points may be mentioned in this regard. Although there was a good deal of available literature on the subject of social learning and self efficacy, the researcher struggled to find literature on role models, modelling and the ensuing effects on children. The researcher was surprised that there was not more available literature on observational learning and media effects.

Regarding the implementation of the study – the unstructured interview: absenteeism of one of the respondents did delay the termination of the implementation phase. Although other potential participants were available, the class teacher had highly recommended the particular child for use in the sample. The researcher was able to interview the respondent, after rescheduling several times, and the data gathered proved valuable.

Most of the literature sources consulted were current. Two authors mentioned by the researcher were not recent: Williams et al. (1995) and Durkin (1995). The researcher made use of these authors’ works owing to the relevance to the research study. Williams et al. (1995) was useful in formulating the research methodology and Durkin (1995) was consulted numerous times regarding the field of interest.

1.12. Definition of Concepts

1.12.1. Child in Middle Childhood

The sixth to about the twelfth year of a child’s life is referred to as the period of middle childhood. Although it is a period of ‘… relative calm in respect of physical development, it is nevertheless an important period in children’s cognitive, social,
emotional and self-concept development’ (Louw et al., 1998:322). The development undergone in these years and the increasing experiential gains, prepares the child for the challenges of adolescence (Louw et al., 1998:322).

This period is referred to by Jean Piaget (1929, 1952, 1983) as the ‘concrete operational stage’ of cognitive development. Children are more organized, logical and flexible than in early childhood (Berk, 2005:428) but ‘… they can perform operations only on images of tangible objects and actual events’ (Weiten, 2001:449).

Middle childhood is also called the ‘school years’ because ‘… its onset is marked by the start of formal schooling’ (Berk, 2005:401). School offers ‘… new opportunities for socialization and for gaining new learning experiences’ (Louw et al., 1998:322). The parent’s role as the primary socializing agent of the child becomes less dominant as the teacher and peer relationships gain importance. These influencing relationships were the focus of this study. Bee and Boyd (2004:301) stress that although ‘… overt attachment behaviors such as clinging and crying are less visible (in the primary school child)… it is easy to lose sight of the fact that children this age are still strongly attached to their parents.’

The researcher defined middle childhood as the sensitive developmental stage, the passage from childhood into adolescence. Social learning is heightened and environmental stimuli take on greater meaning in the child’s emerging self identity.

1.12.2. Role Models

A role model is defined as ‘… somebody to be copied: somebody who is regarded as somebody to look up to and often as an example to emulate’ (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2004). Zirkel (2002:357) asserts that ‘… role models have long been thought to play an important role in young peoples’ development.’ Zirkel (2002:357) states further that most of the available research focuses on role models as information sources on how one should behave (such as Bandura, 1986) and as sources of support and mentorship (such as Echevarria, 1998).
Modelling is a central concept in learning theory and is evident in the opening definition of a role model as ‘somebody to be copied’. ‘Bandura (an influential learning theorist) has argued that the full range of social behaviors, from competitiveness to nurturance, is learned not just by direct reinforcement but also by watching others behave in those ways’ (Bee & Boyd, 2004: 250).

Reinforcement and modelling teaches not only overt behaviour but also expectations, ideas, self concepts and internal standards (Bee & Boyd, 2004:251). Children learn standards of their own behaviour and expectancies about what they can and cannot do. This is what Bandura (in Bee & Boyd, 2004:251) termed as self efficacy. These standards and beliefs affect the child’s behaviour in consistent fashion and form the core of his/her personality. Therefore, the role model that the child chooses to emulate has a great effect on the child’s enduring personality (Bee & Boyd, 2004:251).

For the purpose of this study, the term role model was not only confined to people with whom the child has a relationship, but also included mass media figures who ‘model’ attitudes, behaviour and values for the public (Anderson et al., 2001:108).

1.12.3. Effect

Effect is defined as a ‘… result: a change or changed state occurring as a direct result of action by somebody or something else’ (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2004). This definition concurs with ‘[a] change which is a result or consequence of an action or other cause…’ (Reader’s Digest Word Power Dictionary, 2002:304). The World Book Student Dictionary (2005:240) defines effect as ‘… the power to bring something about…’

This study investigated the result or power that role models have in influencing the self efficacy of children in middle childhood. Thus, it is the effect of role models on the self efficacy of children in the middle childhood years.
1.12.4. Self Efficacy

Self efficacy is defined by Bandura (1986) as the belief of an individual that he/she is able to have control over events that have an influence on his/her life (Durkin, 1995:25). ‘Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than peoples’ beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands’ (Bandura et al., 1996:1206).

The self efficacy of an individual ‘… reflect(s) the individual’s prior history of attainment and reinforcement’ (Durkin, 1995:25). Self efficacy is further defined as the self evaluation of an individual’s competency or ability to perform (Baron & Byrne, 1997:172).

The researcher defined self efficacy as an individual’s perceived achievement. It is a dynamic learned evaluation.

1.13. Division of the Research Report

The research report was set out in accordance with the academic guidelines of a post graduate MSD degree at the University of Pretoria.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter orientates the reader to the context of the study, its main purpose and objectives. This chapter also provides the motivation and research methodology for the implementation of the specific study.

Chapter 2: Role Models and Self Efficacy in Middle Childhood

This chapter comprises the literature pertaining to the specific topic of the study. The key themes are: social learning and role models, self efficacy and the child in middle childhood.
Chapter 3: The Empirical Study
The third chapter contains the data collection and analysis which is the actual empirical study. The research findings are presented and discussed. An integration of the relevant literature is included.

Chapter 4: Conclusions and Recommendations
The final chapter contains the conclusions that were reached on the basis of the data analysis. Recommendations for field practice and further research are included on the basis of these conclusions.
CHAPTER TWO: ROLE MODELS AND SELF EFFICACY IN MIDDLE CHILDHOOD

2.1. Introduction

The social environment in which the child is nurtured offers a rich and colourful expanse conducive to the continuous learning that is childhood. The process of socialization is the tapestry weaved into the growing of a child into a functional and socially competent teenager and adult.

Through the eyes of a child, the surrounding world is unchartered territory begging exploration. There is a freshness evident in the child, senses that are alive to newness, to observing, absorbing and emulating. With eyes wide open, the child is privy to countless opportunities for observational learning – a central tenet of the social learning theory. The role models of the child are the significant socialization agents who, both directly and indirectly, enact appropriate modes of thought, speech and behaviour to the child.

The social world forms a platform of active discovery for the child as he/she develops awareness of self and the environment. ‘In this complex, multifaceted, and multidetermined minefield, children are actively engaged as thinkers and as emotional beings striving to determine who they are and how they relate to the social structure’ (Durkin, 2005:159).

The following chapter paints the theoretical picture highlighting the process of socialization based on the social learning theory. The central aspects of the research study will be explored, namely: children in the middle childhood and the nature of their role models. The study is focused in particular on the impact of these role models on the self efficacy, self evaluation beliefs, of the child.
2.2. The Middle Childhood Years

The researcher defines middle childhood as the sensitive developmental stage, the passage from childhood into adolescence. Middle childhood spans the sixth to about the twelfth year of a child’s life. Social learning is heightened and environmental stimuli take on greater meaning in the child’s emerging self identity.

Although middle childhood is a period of ‘… relative calm in respect of physical development, it is nevertheless an important period in children’s cognitive, social, emotional and self-concept development’ (Louw et al., 1998:322). There is a mistaken notion of middle childhood as a stagnant period (Kaplan, 1998:260).

The researcher notes that Freud’s theory of the stages of psychosexual development categorizes middle childhood as the latency stage. However, it must be noted that the changes in this period of child development are more gradual compared to the growth occurring in early childhood and adolescence (Kaplan, 1998:260). The development undergone in these years and the increasing experiential gains, prepares the child for the challenges of adolescence (Louw et al., 1998:322).

This period is referred to by Jean Piaget (1929, 1952, 1983) as the ‘concrete operational stage’ of cognitive development. Children are more organized, logical and flexible than in early childhood (Berk, 2005:428) but ‘… they can perform operations only on images of tangible objects and actual events’ (Weiten, 2001:449).

Middle childhood is also called the ‘school years’ because ‘… its onset is marked by the start of formal schooling’ (Berk, 2005:401). School offers ‘… new opportunities for socialization and for gaining new learning experiences’ (Louw et al., 1998:322). The parent’s role as the primary socializing agent of the child becomes less dominant as teacher and peer relationships gain in importance. These influencing relationships are the focus of this study. Bee and Boyd (2004:301) stress that although ‘… overt attachment behaviors such as clinging and crying are less visible (in the primary school child)... it is easy to lose sight of the fact that children this age are still strongly attached to their parents.’
‘Children of this age receive feedback from many more sources and develop a sense of their own abilities, strengths, and weaknesses’ (Kaplan, 1998:241). Thus, the self concept of the child evolves during the period of middle childhood.

2.2.1. Self Concept

Kaplan (1998:242) defines self concept as the picture that people have of themselves as they differentiate themselves from the external world. Pajares and Schunk (2001) identify self concept as ‘… the cognitive appraisal one makes of the expectations, descriptions, and prescriptions that one holds about one’s self.’ The researcher uses the terms self concept and self identity interchangeably. The researcher favours the simple definition of Combs (1962:62) of self concept being ‘…what an individual believes he is.’

During middle childhood, the child’s self concept or self identity becomes highly differentiated. ‘Advancing cognitive and linguistic abilities mean that children are able to understand and use a broad array of concepts and terms to describe themselves and other people’ (Durkin, 1995:295). The child has an increased ‘… ability to understand how other people view them’ (Ashford et al., 2001:317). Social comparison is enabled during the school years which results in a more individualized self concept (Ashford et al., 2001:317). It must be stressed that self concept development is a dynamic and ‘…multifaceted social cognitive process which continues through middle childhood, and beyond’ (Durkin, 1995:295).

The researcher is of the opinion that self descriptions are very telling regarding the nature of the individual’s self concept. ‘Children’s descriptions of themselves become more stable and more comprehensive in middle childhood’ (Kaplan, 1998:242). Competency levels in various domains take on significance. Children display ‘… a better understanding of personality traits as internal dispositions that are manifested in diverse behavior’ (Owens, 2002:456). The superficial self descriptions of younger children, about appearance and possessions, change as the child’s self concept develops from an external to an internal frame of reference (Kaplan, 1998:242).
The middle childhood years, characterized by the newly entered formal education system, provides the developing child with many learning opportunities. In Erik Erikson’s (1963, 1968) theory of psychosocial development, each stage of human development presents with a psychosocial conflict or crisis. Resolution of a stage strengthens the ego and requires the attainment of an adaptive psychological quality (Owens, 2002:15-16).

‘During middle childhood children must learn the academic skills of reading, writing, and math, as well as social skills’ (Kaplan, 1998:29). This is the stage of ‘industry versus inferiority’. A sense of industry is promoted when the child receives favourable acknowledgement and he or she achieves success in acquiring the requisite skills. ‘Children who are constantly compared with others unfavourably may develop a sense of inferiority’ (Kaplan, 1998:29).

‘The self concept evolves from a combination of feedback children receive from peers, parents, and teachers and their evaluation of their own subjective experiences’ (Kaplan, 1998:242). Pajares and Schunk (2001) include the concept of the ‘looking-glass self’ proposed by Cooley (1902). This is the metaphor of the self as a mirror, ‘… the appraisals of others act as mirror reflections that provide the information that individuals use to define their own sense of self’ (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

The importance of the self concept is that it ‘… provides structure, coherence, and meaning to one’s personal existence’ (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Pajares and Schunk (2001) have identified self esteem as the ‘... evaluative component of the self-concept.’ The nature of the integration of the feedback from the environment and the evolution of the individual’s self concept, has not yet been tackled. The researcher is particularly interested in the effect that the child’s self beliefs have on behaviour and achievement. In order to explain this, a discussion of the theory of social learning ensues.

2.3. Social Learning

The socialization of children into the norms, beliefs and values espoused by society has a platform within the burgeoning social environment of the child as he/she enters
the school years. Albert Bandura (1963, 1986) was instrumental in the introduction of the social learning theory, which he later renamed the social cognitive theory. For the purpose of this research study, the original name of social learning theory will be used. Bandura (1986:21) stated that ‘… from the social cognitive perspective, human nature is characterized by a vast potentiality that can be fashioned by direct and observational experience into a variety of forms within biological limits.’ Through this theoretical lens ‘… individuals are viewed as proactive and self-regulating rather than as reactive and controlled by biological or environmental forces’ (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

The child and the environment are interdependent, this interplay is termed in social learning theory, reciprocal determinism. The characteristics of an individual ‘… will influence his or her selections in the social environment ... These selections in turn influence the opportunities that he or she finds to develop skills and to learn about the consequences of particular attributes and behaviors’ (Durkin, 1995:24).

Observational learning is stressed as the vehicle for effective learning. Observation speeds up the process of discovery and the consequent imitation or emulation of behaviour (Durkin, 1995:22). ‘Children learn from models how the observed behavior might aid or hinder them in fulfilling their needs in the future’ (Owens, 2002:21). Thus, social learning theory contends that learning also takes place when reinforcement is indirect, this is known as vicarious reinforcement (Owens, 2002:21).

Vicarious consequences are modelled by others as ‘[o]ne of the most useful things that models can do for us is to provide illustrations of the consequences of their actions’ (Durkin, 1995:23). ‘Role models are one source through which children and adolescents acquire attitudes, values, and patterns of conduct’ (Anderson et al., 2001:108). An interesting finding regarding the process of modelling is that modelling is more effective than preaching (Bee & Boyd, 2004: 250). This adds value to the role of socializing agent or role model.

The observation and ensuing emulation of the behaviour seen ‘… is mediated by four levels of process: attention, retention, production, and motivation’ (Durkin, 1995:23). Thus, the imitation or emulation of behaviour is not automatic and requires the
cognitive process of information processing. Many factors influence the attention-worthiness of the modelled activity, such as: the distinctiveness, power and attractiveness of the model. The modelled event requires comprehensibility to ensure retention. Production entails the necessary skills for reproduction of the modelled behaviour. Reinforcements are the vital motivational processes, this includes: vicarious reinforcement, direct external consequences and self reinforcement (Durkin, 1995:23-24).

Durkin (1995:25) states that ‘[a]s a result of modeling and reinforcement, the self incorporates societal standards and monitors whether behaviors are in line with adopted standards.’ The above discussion has outlined the basic theory of social learning and how children are socialized as functional members of society. The researcher is aware that human motivation is a complex arena. The researcher has noted that two children with the same IQ can achieve different results, identical twins can have diverse academic pursuits. The uniqueness of every individual and the power of self knowledge impacts on the influence of social learning. The power of self knowledge and especially self efficacy will broaden this discussion.

2.4. Self Efficacy

Bandura (1986) defines self efficacy as the belief of an individual that he/she is able to have control over events that have an influence on him/her (Durkin, 1995:25). ‘Among the mechanisms of personal agency, none is more central or pervasive than peoples’ beliefs in their capabilities to exercise control over their level of functioning and environmental demands’ (Bandura et al., 1996:1206).

The self efficacy of an individual ‘… reflect(s) the individual’s prior history of attainment and reinforcement’ (Durkin, 1995:25). Self efficacy is further defined as the self evaluation of an individual’s competency or ability to perform (Baron & Byrne, 1997:172). The researcher defines self efficacy as an individual’s perceived achievement, a dynamic learned evaluation.

The underlying notion is aptly expressed by Bandura et al. (1996:1206), ‘[u]nless people believe that they can produce desired effects by their actions, they have little
incentive to act.’ Therefore, beliefs of capability are central to achievement as seen above in the process of the emulation of modelled behaviour. These beliefs fuel action.

It is important to distinguish between self efficacy and other self notions. It is only self efficacy that ‘… is of a prospective and operative nature, which furnishes this construct with additional explanatory and predictive power in a variety of research applications’ (Luszczynska, Gutiérrez-Doña & Schwarter, 2005:81).

Pajares (2005:342) states that ‘… self efficacy beliefs help determine what people will do with the knowledge and skills they possess…(these beliefs) are also critical determinants of how well knowledge and skill are acquired in the first place.’ Pajares (2005:342) furthers that an individual interprets the results of his/her actions, therefore, ‘… their choices, behaviors, and competencies can typically be better predicted by the beliefs they hold about their accomplishments than by what they are actually capable of accomplishing.’

The researcher has seen in practice that determination and belief in the individual’s ability is a characteristic of the entrepreneurial spirit. Innovation requires a resilient sense of self efficacy in the face of uncertainty and long-term effort. Bandura (1998) states that ‘[i]t is, therefore, not surprising that one rarely finds realists in the ranks of innovators and great achievers.’ The researcher has noted a certain self assuredness perceptible in highly efficacious people.

The words of Pajares (2005:243) encompass the command of self efficacy: ‘… it is not simply a matter of how capable you are; it is also a matter of how capable you believe you are.’ Self efficacy beliefs have diverse effects that span the areas of human functioning (Bandura, 1997a:3). ‘Such beliefs influence aspirations and strength of goal commitments, level of motivation and perseverance in the face of difficulties and setbacks, resilience to adversity, quality of analytic thinking, causal attributions for successes and failures, and vulnerability to stress and depression’ (Bandura et al., 1996:1206).
High self efficacy enhances personal accomplishment and well being. ‘People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than threats to be avoided… They heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure’ (Bandura, 1998). In contrast, individuals with low efficacy beliefs doubt their capabilities, ‘… have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue…They slacken their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties’ (Bandura, 1998).

The far reaching effects of self efficacy regulate human functioning through cognitive, motivational, affective and selective processes (Bandura, 1998). Efficacy beliefs have a pervasive effect on functioning and performance, ‘… self efficacy beliefs help foster precisely the outcome one expects, which is the very heart of the self-fulfilling prophesy. Confident students anticipate successful outcomes’ (Pajares, 2005:342). The process of social learning underlies the role of social determinants in behaviour emulation. Thus far, the effect of efficacy beliefs has been seen; further insight into the sources of these beliefs follows.

2.4.1. Sources of Self Efficacy

‘Most human behavior is, of course, determined by many interacting factors, and so people are contributors to, rather than the sole determiners of, what happens to them’ (Bandura, 1997a:3). Individuals interpret information from four sources in the formation of self efficacy perceptions: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences (modelling), social persuasions, and physiological reactions (somatic and emotional states) (Pajares, 2005:344; Bandura, 1998). The following discussion also includes the means for enhancing self efficacy beliefs, as indicated by Pajares (2005:344-366).

2.4.1.1. Mastery Experience

It was seen above that children in the middle childhood, entering formal schooling, acquire invaluable skills. These skills provide the tools for further learning and the negotiation of the world around them as social beings. School provides the platform for social comparison and successful achievement builds the child’s ego (as seen in
Erikson’s theory of psychosocial development, industry versus inferiority). Pajares (2005:344) states simply that ‘[s]uccess raises self efficacy; failure lowers it.’

For the building of efficacy beliefs ‘[a]cademic work should be hard enough that it energizes, not so hard that it paralysis’ (Pajares, 2005:344). Pajares (2005:344) furthers that Bandura distinguishes between two types of self confidence, one is a trait of personality and one comes from knowledge of a certain subject. It must be noted that mastery experiences are not always about succeeding. ‘This is because self-efficacy is not so much about learning how to succeed as it is about learning how to persevere when one does not succeed’ (Pajares, 2005:345).

The child must gain self knowledge of his/her capabilities in broadening areas of functioning as he/she expands his/her transactions with the environment (Bandura, 1997a:168). Thus, it is the experience and the consequent interpretation of the experience that influences an individual’s efficacy beliefs. The influence of observational learning on the individual’s cognitive processes ensues.

2.4.1.2. Vicarious Experience

The primary socialization agents of the child are usually the parents. This changes as the young child enters the middle childhood years. The school environment provides a forum for further socialization. Peer relationships and the social group are sources for learning the behaviour, norms and beliefs espoused by society. The teacher-student relationship is also very important in the child’s development and socialization. These formative years of schooling aid in shaping the child’s enduring personality (Louw et al., 1998:322).

‘Observing the successes and failures of peers perceived as similar in capability contributes to beliefs in one’s own capabilities (“if he can do it, so can I!”’) (Pajares, 2005:346). This concurs with the assertion of Bandura (1998) that ‘… the greater the assumed similarity the more persuasive are the models’ successes and failures.’ Pajares (2005:347) states that ‘…students who model excellence can imbue other students with the belief that they too can achieve that excellence.’
This last quote above highlights that models do not only provide a social standard for comparison of personal capability. ‘People seek proficient models who possess the competencies to which they aspire’ (Bandura, 1998). Competent models transmit knowledge through thought and action, thereby teaching observers effective strategies and skills in the management of environmental demands. The acquisition of better means of coping enhances an individual’s perceived capabilities, his/her self efficacy (Bandura, 1998).

The researcher has seen this while attending an open, group meeting of Alcoholics Anonymous. The ‘survivor’s account of his battle and success in controlling his alcohol addiction provided both inspiration and a model for aspiration. The convener of the support group stated that the goal of the survivors’ personal accounts is to facilitate identification within his listeners, “if he can do it, so can I” (Pajares, 2005:346).

The effect of vicarious experience and the process of modelling is of interest in this research study. Thus, after this current discussion on the sources of efficacy, the topic of modelling will be extended.

2.4.1.3. Social Persuasions

Pajares (2005:348) states that ‘… self efficacy beliefs are influenced by the words (and actions) of others, whether these be intentional or accidental.’ The researcher has seen in practice that well-meaning words of encouragement can have a positive effect on an individual’s perseverance in the face of adversity. This is also true to the detriment of an individual’s performance. However, the researcher recalls an oft-spoken phrase of ‘prove them wrong!’, which underlies the power of negative encouragement as the fuel for positive performance.

When an individual is verbally persuaded that he/she possesses the capabilities with which to succeed, he/she is likely to mobilize and sustain greater effort (Bandura, 1998). Unfortunately, it is easier to undermine these beliefs than promote them. Bandura (1998) states that ‘[b]y constricting activities and undermining motivation, disbelief in one’s capabilities creates its own behavioral validation.’ An individual
with low self efficacy will rather not exert effort or will give up quickly in any difficulty, thus, proving to himself/herself a lack of capability.

The researcher has noted the popularity of the notion of praising the effort over the achievement, in the realms of education and parenting. Pajares (2005:350) posits this concept to teachers and parents for the enhancement of self efficacy. ‘Foster the belief that competence or ability is a changeable, controllable aspect of development, and encourage effort, perseverance, and persistence as ways to overcome obstacles’ (Pajares, 2005:350). Thus, success is measured ‘… in terms of self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others’ (Bandura, 1998).

It is clear that social persuasions, as a source of efficacy beliefs, is closely linked to modelling and the role of role models. Verbal messages from a respected and influential source are assimilated more readily into an individual’s self beliefs. An individual’s bodily and emotional reactions to adversity provide the final source for judging and enhancing self efficacy beliefs as will be seen below.

2.4.1.4. Physiological and Emotional States

The researcher has often seen the embarrassment that clients experience, in therapy, after an emotional outburst. There is a misguided belief that emotional expression signifies weakness. This is furthered by the words of Pajares (2005:351) that ‘… it is not the intensity of the physical indicator or mood state itself that is important, but the individual’s interpretation of it.’ Thus, those with high self efficacy take an energizing view of the emotional state, but those beleaguered with self-doubt may perceive it as debilitating (Pajares, 2005:351).

It is seen that an individual relies on his/her emotional and physical states to judge his/her capabilities. ‘They read tension, anxiety, and depression as signs of personal deficiency. In activities that require strength and stamina, they interpret fatigue and pain as indicators of low physical efficacy’ (Bandura, 1997b). Pajares (2005:351) states that negative feelings and undue anxiety towards a certain task provides cues of something amiss. These feelings signify lack of confidence in ability, low self
efficacy, and are a sign that an individual would benefit from help and emotional support.

An interdependent relationship exists between depression and low sense of self efficacy. ‘A low sense of efficacy to exercise control over stressors and highly valued outcomes gives rise to feelings of futility and depression’ (Bandura et al., 1996:1210). Deflated and dejected self beliefs caused by depression, in turn, erode an individual’s beliefs regarding his/her capacity to achieve, his/her self efficacy. A vicious downward cycle is created with the combination of low mood and impaired social efficacy corroding feelings of self worth.

Pajares (2005:352) furthers that self-handicapping strategies are born out of fear and are aimed at the avoidance of the anxiety that accompanies the fear. The conviction is that ‘[i]t is less anxiety-producing to fail believing you didn’t try than to fail knowing you tried your best’ (Pajares, 2005:352). These strategies are commonly utilised by youngsters and include: ‘… little or no effort on the task… self-deprecating talk, deliberate procrastination, setting goals so high and unattainable that failure can be viewed as “failing with honour,” and setting goals so easy that one cannot fail.’ A strategy for lowering stress and enhancing self efficacy is through the fostering and modelling of optimism (Pajares, 2005:352).

In summary, it was seen that the social environment has a powerful influence in shaping the efficacy beliefs held by an individual. The child in middle childhood is at a critical developmental juncture as the broader social environment gains significance. As indicated, vicarious experience, observational learning and modelling is of particular interest in this study as it pertains to the sense of efficacy of the primary school child. The following discussion will elucidate this topic, with peer relationships forming the point of departure.
2.4.2. Peer Relationships

Durkin (1995:295) states that ‘[w]e need other people in order to determine what is distinctive about our own self.’ The self concept of the child changes in the middle childhood years. Children gain in understanding how others view them. ‘Children’s self-concepts also become more individuated, so that they begin to see themselves as different from others, as unique’ (Ashford et al., 2001:317). During these years children identify more with peers and less with adults (Kaplan, 1998:243). The researcher has seen the forlorn look on a mother’s face as her child begins formal schooling. There is a sense of loss as she releases the young child from her clutches, the child stepping toward greater independence.

The primary school child is enthusiastic and excitable as every new day brings new experiences of discovery in his/her social world. Ashford et al. (2001:330) states that ‘… peers are critical to the healthy development of a child – perhaps second in importance only to the influence of parents.’ Peers fulfil the human need for companionship which includes the feeling of connectedness and social involvement (Ashford et al., 2001:330).

‘As children age, they begin spending more time in the company of their peers than in the company of their parents’ (Burton, Ray & Mehta, 2003:246). Friendship fulfils certain functions conducive to child development. Owens (2002:459) based on Hartup (1998) identifies certain beneficial functions of friendship. Friendships, or peer relationships, provide contexts for the acquisition and elaboration of basic social skills. As stated above, children grow in self knowledge coupled with knowledge of others and the world. The companionship of peers ‘… give children emotional support in the face of stress’ (Owens, 2002:459). The final function is that peer relationships are ‘… forerunners of subsequent relationships in that they provide experience in handling intimacy and mutual regulation’ (Owens, 2002:459).

The nature of the effect of peer relationships will be detailed below, specifically relating to social comparison and peer influence.
2.4.2.1. Social Comparison

Peers provide a rich and effective source for social learning. ‘[S]ocial learning theorists maintain that observing others, and the consequences of others’ behavior, is one of the most economical means of gathering information about social norms and expectations’ (Durkin, 1995:175). Social comparison provides much opportunity for evaluation of the capabilities of the child in differing areas.

Durkin (1995:317) defines social comparison as ‘… the process whereby people compare their own attributes, behavior, achievements and understanding with those of other people.’ Baron and Byrne (2004:123) define social comparison, based on Festinger (1954), as ‘[t]he process through which we compare ourselves to others in order to determine whether our view of social reality is or is not correct.’

The researcher is particularly interested in the power of peer relationships. Ashford et al. (2001:330) state that ‘… assessment of children’s social competence by their peers is a more powerful predictor of later behavior problems than assessment by parents, teachers or mental health practitioners.’ This concurs with the view of Owens (2002:457) that between the ages of 11 and 13, early adolescence, social characteristics have the most significance. Owens (2002:457) furthers that ‘[i]nterpersonal relationships are perceived as constituting the core of self…’ which explains why relational discord brings untold distress to the child in the middle childhood years.

As stated, peers serve an important function in efficacy development. ‘Because few children excel in all aspects, social comparison fosters a more differentiated awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses’ (Owens, 2002:457). Children are sensitive to social standing among peers, thus, social comparison is informative. Furthermore, peers with more experience, knowledge and competence are models of efficacious behaviour and thinking (Bandura, 1998).

‘Through social comparisons, the social environment affects not only our self-concepts and goals but the very framework within which we organize our understandings of the social world’ (Durkin, 1995:322). Peers provide the lenses
through which the child views the world. The researcher has seen this in the 
behaviour of primary school children. She has perceived fierce social and 
achievement competition. It is the view of the researcher that the need of children for 
an ‘exclusive best friend’ is purposive for the child’s ego development. Friends are 
both healthy and necessary.

Bandura et al. (1996:1209) found that ‘[c]hildren who are considerate of their peers 
and are accepted by them will experience the favorable school environment as more 
conducive to learning than if they behave in socially alienating ways and are 
repeatedly rejected by their peers.’ This is understandable in light of the above 
discussion. As Bandura et al. (1996:1207) further, ‘… children’s intellectual 
development cannot be isolated from the social relations within which it is imbedded 
and from its interpersonal effects.’

In middle childhood, friend selection becomes more discriminative. There is an 
interdependent relationship between efficacy beliefs and peer selection, ‘… students 
who doubt their intellectual efficacy are likely to gravitate to peers who do not 
subscribe to academic values and pursuits’ (Bandura et al., 1996:1209). This is also 
true for the positive. On the other hand, discriminatory peer selection and association 
promotes self efficacy in the directions of mutual interest. The consequences of this is 
that potentialities are often left underdeveloped (Bandura, 1998).

As seen above, children view themselves based on others’ views of them and others’ 
capabilities. Thus, if another person does not recognize or value a certain talent in the 
child then that talent will lie dormant. The researcher has seen the consequences in 
adults whose developmental focus rests in the career field pursued. Established 
behaviour patterns and an established friendship group can stifle diversity and 
innovation in human growth.

It has ‘… become clear that not all peer interactions and influence is positive’ (Burton 
et al., 2003:235). The discussion below will elucidate the nature and effect of peer 
influence as it impacts the life of the child.
2.4.2.2. Peer Influence

The peer relationships built during the school years can last a lifetime. As seen above, friends provide a cultivating environment for personal growth. A characteristic of the powerful peer relationship is the accompanying influence – widely referred to as peer pressure. ‘Each child influences his or her friends and is, in turn, influenced by them’ (Burton et al., 2003:239).

This influence can be viewed through the lens of social learning: ‘… peers influence each other not only through direct exchanges and reinforcement, but also through modelling of others engaged in prosocial and conflict situations, facilitating the observer’s ability to interact in socially competent ways with peers’ (Burton et al., 2003:236). An understanding of this influence will thus broaden the discussion of observational learning and peers as role models. Burton et al. (2003:237-239) identify different types of peer influence which will be detailed below.

**Reinforcement and reward** is the first type of peer influence, this refers to ‘… anything that promotes a behavior being repeated in the future’ (Burton et al., 2003:237). This includes the support and companionship offered by a friend. The researcher clearly recalls the requests of her own peers, at the onset of middle childhood, beseeching: ‘I’ll be your best friend if you let me use your markers!’ It must be noted that this influence extends to vicarious reinforcement, ‘[w]hether a child’s own behavior was reinforced or a child witnessed another child’s behavior being reinforced (modeling), it becomes highly influential in changing behavior’ (Burton et al., 2003:238).

Alternatively, **negative reinforcement** presents another mechanism of peer influence. ‘Negative reinforcement is increasing the likelihood of a behavioral occurrence because the behavior keeps something negative from occurring’ (Burton et al., 2003:238). Burton et al. (2003:236) stress that ‘… many deviant activities need the context of a peer group for their initiation as well as their maintenance… children usually do not behave mischievously on their own.’ Peers reframe the nature and consequences of deviant behaviour for the child, leading to a desensitization when perpetrated (Burton et al., 2003:238).
Of particular interest to this study, **modelling** is the most subtle type of peer influence. Burton *et al.*, (2003:238) define modelling as the ‘... imitating of one person’s behavior to another person’s behavior as a consequence of direct or symbolic observation.’

Burton *et al.*, (2003:238) further, based on Berndt (1996), that ‘... a child may model another’s behavior because they admire and want to be like them.’ This is the **referent power** of peers as ‘... children often try to become friends with other children they perceive as popular, athletic, or outstanding in some way’ (Burton *et al.*, 2003:238). Owens (2002:461) states that children perceived by peers as popular display high levels of social competence, the skills that enhance social functioning. This would is termed social efficacy in terms of social learning theory. Thus, children with a high degree of social efficacy often possess the power of peer influence.

As seen above, children viewed as outstanding in some way are revered by their peers. This is the last type of peer influence, namely **expert social power**, ‘... competent individuals generally exert greater influence than those not competent... their ideas may be more highly valued and in turn, more influential than the advice of a non-expert friend’ (Burton *et al.*, 2003:239). The researcher is of the opinion that expert power extends not only to knowledge but also to experience. Thus, it is not only the clever children in the class that wield the power of influence, but also those that are ‘street-wise’.

However, it must be noted that ‘... peer influence has different effects in different dyadic relationships’ (Burton *et al.*, 2003:239). As mentioned in the previous section, best friend relationships are significant during the period of middle childhood. The ‘choseness’ of the friendship creates increased intimacy and a unique mutual engagement (Burton *et al.*, 2003:239). It would be expected that best friends would have a greater influence on each other.

Furthermore, Burton *et al.*, (2003:247) highlight three areas where children are more susceptible to peer influence. ‘Children of lower social status are likely to be more influenced than higher status children’ (Burton *et al.*, 2003:247). The researcher has noticed in practice that the financial instability that accompanies a lower social status
results in limited intellectual, recreational and material opportunities for the children. The social comparison characteristic of middle childhood means that poorer children feel different compared to their middle income peers to whom they aspire.

As seen in the above discussion on middle childhood, these years are a period of rapid and meaningful child development and identity formation. Social interactions provide the context for such development. Thus, ‘… children whose personal relationships (parents, other peers) are less satisfying are more susceptible to friends’ influence’ (Burton et al., 2003:247).

‘Lastly, children appear to be more susceptible to friends’ influence when the behavior/situation is not particularly important to their sense of self’ (Burton et al., 2003:247). The researcher is of the opinion that this relates to the popular approach to activities of ‘why not, I have nothing to lose!’ When this is the case, and the child’s self worth is not at stake, then its easier to be persuaded by peer influence.

It was seen that the peer relationships during the school years fulfil many functions both directly (for example: companionship, social comparison) and indirectly (for example: vicarious reinforcement). The importance of peer relationships has been highlighted, the discussion now turns to the primary socialization agent of the child – the parent.

### 2.4.3. Parent-Child Relationships

The middle childhood years bring many changes, one of these changes being the shifting role of the parent. The child assumes a different view of the parent. The beginning years of middle childhood sees ‘… children strive to please their parents and teachers and derive great pleasure from reaching goals these adults set for them and for acting in a way that meets their standards’ (Kaplan, 1998:243).

As middle childhood progresses, peer relationships, peer pressure and the need for acceptance sets in. Children’s sense of identification shifts from adults to identifying with peers. The parents who were once idealized as role models by the young child
‘… are now seen as fallible human beings who can be, and often are, arbitrary and wrong’ (Kaplan, 1998:243).

The family and especially the parents are the forum for the initial efficacy experiences of the child. As stated several times above, the child uses the social environment in gaining self knowledge of his or her abilities in different areas of functioning (Bandura, 1998). It is the family that provides the secure base from which the child goes forth and explores the world.

Middle childhood provides many new experiences for the child. The constancy of parents and the nurturing family provides the child with self confidence. Parents aid in the development of the self concept of the child, which is ‘… an inherently social activity’ (Durkin, 1995:295). To this end, ‘[c]hildren are engaged in interactions with more mature beings who are very interested in them, and who provide both context and guidance’ (Durkin, 1995:295).

It is interesting to note that it is the conflicts of interest between the child and the parent that aid in the child’s self definition. ‘Awareness of the self is prompted in the course of exchanges with others who try to control or influence behavior’ (Durkin, 1995:296). The researcher notes that just like the two year old child asserts his/her sense of autonomy, so too does the child in middle childhood assert his/her independence with resultant ‘… self-definitions that reflect others’ ascriptions but do not necessarily accept them’ (Durkin, 1995:297). In this regard it is seen that ‘… others’ perceptions of the self – affects us but does not simply shape us’ (Durkin, 1995:298).

However, it should be stressed that although the role of the parent is changing during this period, the parent still wields influence over the child and is a key figure in the social environment of the child. Research by Bandura et al. (1996:1206-1222) highlights the influence of parents on the self efficacy beliefs of the child. ‘Parents’ sense of efficacy to promote their children’s academic development and the educational aspirations they hold for them enhance their children’s beliefs in their own academic efficacy and raise their aspirations’ (Bandura et al., 1996:1207). Parental academic efficacy was entirely mediated through its effect on children’s
beliefs in their capability to regulate learning activities and mastery of coursework (Bandura et al., 1996:1207).

It was noted that the messages and attitudes conveyed by parents colour the approach assumed by the child. Thus, ‘… parental valuation of education played a key role in setting the course of their children’s educational development during their formative years’ (Bandura et al., 1996:1219). A senior teacher (Galgut, 2007) at a girls’ high school concurred with this statement in a recent conversation with the researcher. The teacher (Galgut, 2007) stated that a number of the parents in the school were bad mouthing teachers in front of their children and this was having detrimental effects in the classroom. A lack of discipline and respect for the teachers ensues. The proactive response of the principal of the school was to cultivate better relations with the parents through evenings of parenting education (Galgut, 2007).

Bandura et al. (1996:1216) highlight a further notion of the effect of parents’ self confidence on the confidence and subsequent efficacy beliefs fostered in their children. Parents model attitudes, beliefs and behaviour for the child. Based on extensive research (Elder & Ardelt, 1992; Elder, Eccles, Ardelt & Lord, 1993), Bandura et al., (1996: 1216) state that ‘[p]arents who have a high sense of parenting efficacy select and construct environments conducive to their children’s development and serve as strong advocates on their behalf in transactions with educational and other social systems.’ Parents provide support as the child negotiates the often complex peer relationships and accompanying peer and social pressure.

It is clear that the parent’s response to the child and the parent’s social environment makes a deep impression on the child. The discussion below furthers this notion with emphasis on praise and achievement.

2.4.3.1. Validation, Praise and Achievement

The effect of parenting styles on children’s efficacy was stated by Durkin (1995:151-152): ‘… the kinds of ideas and beliefs that the parents hold about the nature of child development should influence their strategies in child management (and hence the child's developmental experiences).’ Early child development provides the basis for
later growth. ‘Successful experiences in the exercise of personal control are central to the early development of social and cognitive competence’ (Bandura, 1998). As seen in the sources of efficacy, mastery experiences are central to efficacy development.

Shears and Robinson (2005:65) emphasise the effect of parental response to their child as a strong determinant of subsequent child behaviour. These authors propose ‘…parental beliefs as having a direct influence on parental behaviors and that these behaviors are what exert on children’s development’ (Shears & Robinson, 2005:65). Siegler, Deloache and Eisenberg (2003:397) further that ‘[p]arents who respond to their children’s sadness and anxiety by dismissing or criticizing their feelings communicate to their children that their feelings are not valid.’ Emotional support results in higher levels of emotional and social competence in the child. The validation of feelings by parents teaches children to regulate emotional arousal and also teaches children constructive ways of emotional expression (Siegler et al., 2003:397).

The discussion will now extend to praising the child, the positive validation of the child. As praise extends to achievement, success and failure, it is important to understand how the child interprets achievement and evaluates his/her level of ability. Thus, the level of academic efficacy of the child. ‘[Y]ounger children do not differentiate ability from effort… (they) tend to attribute nonmastery of a task to a lack of effort rather than ability… young children’s persistence on academic tasks does not decline as a consequence of failure’ (Owens, 2002:422).

During the middle childhood years, children ‘… learn to see intelligence as a global, stable entity whose adequacy is judged by their performance… (intelligence is no longer seen as) a repertoire of skills that can be endlessly expanded through their efforts’ (Owens, 2002:422). The implications of this belief is that failure becomes debilitating as it signifies a lack of intelligence. Mueller and Dweck (1998:33) stress the importance of praising the child’s effort rather than the child’s ability as the latter praise maintains this rigid belief.

Praise for ability can negatively effect the child’s response to achievement and the child’s academic efficacy in two ways. Firstly, the child views intelligence as a matter
of high performance. Thus, he/she desires to maintain his/her performance level. He/she may sacrifice valuable learning opportunities if there is a risk of failure. The second negative effect ensues as children ‘… read low intelligence from poor performance’, as intelligence is a stable trait directly reflected in performance (Mueller & Dweck, 1998:34).

The belief of intelligence being a stable trait, not effected by amount of effort expended, signifies an external locus of control. This is when children ‘… believe events in their lives are beyond their control and usually achieve less’ (Owens, 2002:423).

However, when children possess an internal locus of control they recognize ‘… that they are responsible for the caliber of work they are doing in school’ (Owens, 2002:423), thus, they have control over their level of achievement. This control extends to the amount of effort invested in a certain task, ‘… individuals who attribute their successes to internal abilities or traits have been classified as being high in achievement efficacy and motivation, individuals who attribute their failures to ability have not been credited with the same positive strivings’ (Mueller & Dweck, 1998:34).

Praising the effort expended fosters an internal locus of control in children. The experience of failure is reframed. ‘[E]ffort related praise may lead children to focus on the process of their work and the possibilities for learning and improvement that hard work may offer’ (Mueller & Dweck, 1998:34). Children then learn ‘… to attribute their performance to effort, which can vary in amount, rather than to a stable ability’ (Mueller & Dweck, 1998:34). Thus, failure is viewed as a ‘…temporary lapse in effort rather than a deficit in intelligence’ (Mueller & Dweck, 1998:34).

The researcher is of the opinion that praising effort over ability provides the child with a great developmental advantage. Furthermore, the researcher has seen countless times in practice that there is a lack of awareness of the detrimental effects of praised-ability. This may hopefully be changing as modern parenting styles are adopted. ‘Modern parenting beliefs and activities are more focused on encouraging self-direction in children whereas traditional parenting values assert that children must conform to their parent’s wishes’ (Shears & Robinson, 2005:66).
It must be stressed that ‘encouraging self direction’ (Shears & Robinson, 2005:66) of modern parenting does not mean a lack of discipline and parental presence in the home. The classic notion of discipline as spankings and allegiance to an authoritarian parental figure is reframed by the following definition favoured by the researcher. Discipline is ‘… the structure that the adult sets up for the child’s life that is designed to allow him or her to fit into the real world happily and effectively’ (Caughty, Miller, Genevro, Huang & Nautiyal, 2003:518).

Thus, discipline is not punitive and harsh but rather presents a pedagogical structure aimed at the child’s effective socialization. The definition also emphasises the role of the authoritative adult as mediator of this structure.

The authoritative adult has a marked influence as the child develops beliefs regarding his/her capabilities and forms his/her aspirations. When the child leaves the home for the classroom, the teacher provides another authoritative adult that will model and cultivate functional (and sometimes dysfunctional) efficacy beliefs.

### 2.4.4. Teacher-Student Relationship

‘During the crucial formative period of children’s lives, the school functions as the primary setting for the cultivation and social validation of cognitive capabilities… their knowledge and thinking skills are continually tested, evaluated, and socially compared’ (Bandura, 1997a:175). The nature of a child’s belief in his/her cognitive efficacy has repercussions on both his/her social and intellectual development. ‘A low sense of cognitive efficacy not only curtails positive peer relationships but fosters socially alienating aggressive and transgressive behavior’ (Bandura, 1997a:176).

Bandura (1997a:243) stresses that every teacher ‘… operates collectively within an interactive social system rather than as isolates.’ Teachers have a strong influence in cultivating and maintaining the school environment. The teacher communicates the child’s achievements within the classroom, verbally and non-verbally. The classroom structure effects the perceptions that a child has of his/her ability in the way that social comparison is emphasised relative to self comparison in appraisal (Bandura, 1997a:175).
A child spends many hours in the classroom under the charge of the teacher. ‘One of the most overlooked school factors is the quality of the relationship between teachers and students, especially at-risk students… Teachers underestimate the powerful impact of their attitudes and beliefs on student success’ (Davis & Dupper, 2004:179,184). The teacher-child relationship effects the nature of the child’s learning experiences, poor relationships are linked with early school leaving (Davis & Dupper, 2004:183).

‘[T]eachers cannot educate students in whom they have no confidence and students cannot learn from teachers in whom they have no trust’ (Willie, 2000:256). The sense of efficacy of teachers has a strong influence on this interrelationship. ‘Teachers with a high sense of efficacy tend to view difficult students as reachable and teachable and regard their learning problems as surmountable by ingenuity and extra effort’ (Bandura, 1997a:242). A message of positive regard is conveyed to the students as the teacher does not project the self doubt characteristic of low self efficacy.

Thus, teachers who praise their students and express confidence in them, set foundations for positive learning experiences and building positive relationships. This positive regard, together with the requisite respect towards the teacher, enhances the student’s motivation and fosters a healthy teacher-student relationship (Davis & Dupper, 2004:183).

Furthermore, Ashford et al. (2001:355) use the relevant findings of a study conducted by Madon, Jussim and Eccles (1997) in highlighting the effect of teachers on student performance. It was found that teachers who underestimate a student’s achievement potential have only a marginal effect (10 percentiles) on the student’s test scores. However, teachers who have high hopes regarding the student’s ability can raise the test score significantly (30 percentiles). These results may be viewed with reference to the student’s self efficacy beliefs. A student with a sense of efficacy grounded in his/her academic self regulatory capability, will be less vulnerable to the adverse effects of a teacher with low efficacy beliefs. However, a student with self doubt regarding his/her academic abilities, will be sensitive to the teacher’s effect (Bandura, 1997a:242).
It was seen that younger children are more susceptible to the influence of the teacher’s sense of efficacy. The reason for this is the young child’s unstable sense of efficacy, informal peer structures and lack of social comparison as a source of information about his/her capabilities (Bandura, 1997a:242).

As the middle childhood years progress, peer relationships and self knowledge heighten; there is still significance in the teacher’s role. In light of the above discussion, the researcher is of the opinion that one of the central roles of the teacher is in cultivating a nurturing classroom environment conducive to positive learning experiences. This support structure provides the framework for growth.

It must be noted that it is natural for the teacher to respond differently to each student. The researcher is of the opinion that each student should be treated differently in accordance with what best suits his/her personality type. However, this differential treatment is often hued in stereotypical gender expectations, as will be seen below.

2.4.4.1. Differential Treatment

As seen above, the teacher’s attitude and approach to teaching colours the process of learning for the child. Each child in the class has a unique contribution to the overall class personality. It may be expected that gender influences the contribution of the student. The response of the teacher to the students has a strong influence in the cultivation of societal gender prescriptions.

‘[T]eachers prefer high-achieving boys and will interact at a higher level and encourage continued responses from them’ (Owens, 2002:429). The gender stereotype being upheld is that boys ‘are easier to talk with… more honest… more willing to try new things…’ (Owens, 2002:429). Thus, a teacher succumbing to this prescription, succumbs to rigid expectations – often leaving little room for individualism. The researcher is of the opinion that this extends to a curtailment of personal growth. Owens (2002:429) states that the stereotype of girls as dependable and conforming discourages the assertiveness and active learning that is beneficial for furthering academic achievement.
Differential treatment and the male-bias is seen across the academic spectrum. ‘[B]oys for whom the teacher has high expectations have the most favorable interactions with their teachers; boys for whom teachers have low expectations are criticized the most, whereas girls of all achievement levels are treated similarly to one another’ (Owens, 2002:429). It is thus understandable that boys receive greater recognition for academic achievement than girls (Owens, 2002:429).

The underlying message communicated to girls is a denigration of effort, achievement and intrinsic attributes since ‘… girls are recognized and reinforced for their physical appearance, presumably denigrating their intellectual capabilities’ (Owens, 2002:429). The researcher is aware that these gender expectations are subtle. However, in the sensitive developmental period of middle childhood, the child absorbs these subtleties. Stereotypes and specifically gender expectations are influential in the socialization of the child regarding societal norms, beliefs and values.

In summary, self efficacy beliefs (what the child believes he/she is capable of) are grown and cultivated through interactions with others. These beliefs span all levels of functioning, such as: academic efficacy and social efficacy. The social environment of the child in middle childhood is rich with social learning opportunities. Parents, peers and teachers are key socialization agents for the child as was seen above. In the global reality of modern living, the media presents a significant agent of the socialization process. The following discussion explores the influence of media and other significant role models in the life of the child. The discussion will be focused through the lens of gender socialization.

### 2.5. Gender Socialization

Social learning theory has a particular focus on gender or sex-typed behaviour, ‘… the translation of gender knowledge into gender-related behavior’ (Golombok & Hines, 2002:130). Gender identity development is an aspect of the socialization process of children. ‘Social norms dictate that men are expected to possess masculine characteristics and women are expected to possess feminine characteristics’ (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006:538). Parents are seen as key figures in communicating these gender expectations to their children... both by differentially reinforcing their
daughters and sons and by acting as role models of sex-typed behavior’ (Golombok & Hines, 2002:130).

‘Gender is given, grown, imposed, expected, regulated, learned, reflected upon, enacted, experienced, and shared’ (Durkin, 2005:159). Thus, gender socialization is a complex and dynamic process. Durkin (2005:143,144) furthers that, according to social learning theory, ‘…the modes of social influence affect the ways in which children construct their gender-linked knowledge… ultimately gender role acquisition is determined by the environment.’ The modes of influence referred to are: observational learning (modelling), enactive experience (learning from the outcomes and reactions of one’s own gender-linked behaviour) and direct tuition (Durkin, 2005:143).

The broadening social environment of the child in middle childhood includes many important sources for gender development; peers, teachers and the mass media influence the child’s emerging gender understanding (Barrett & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005:9; Golombok & Hines, 2002:128). ‘But it is gender stereotypes (widely held beliefs about the characteristics that are typical of males and females), rather than specific individuals, that seem to be most influential in the acquisition of sex-typed behavior’ (Golombok & Hines, 2002:129). The discussion above has already highlighted the gender stereotypes relating to the academic sphere. The following extends the view of gender stereotypes to include the sporting arena. The role of the mass media in gender stereotyping will close the discussion.

2.5.1 Sports and Gender

It is interesting to note that ‘[c]ross-sex friendships are relatively rare in middle childhood’ (Owens, 2002:459). Thus, as peer significance heightens during these years, so does social comparison – comparison to same-sex peers. The comparisons span not only intellectual capabilities and social characteristics but also sporting ability. During the school years the child is introduced to extra-mural activities where skill, practice and social inclusion become issues. As will be seen, the sporting arena is replete with gender expectations.
Coakley (2001:21) defines sports as ‘… institutionalized competitive activities that involve rigorous physical exertion or the use of relatively complex physical skills by participants motivated by personal enjoyment and external rewards.’ The researcher views sport as a formalized physical art that can be played for pleasure, for a club, a team or professionally.

The gender stereotypes are attached to type of sport pursued by each gender. ‘[C]hildren’s participation in sports and activities can be bound by social constructions of gender and gender stereotypes… a subconscious yet widely held perception of boys’ and girls’ sports persists’ (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006:536). The researcher is aware that women’s soccer teams exist on both a school level and a professional level. However, women soccer players do not get the exposure and support that male soccer players enjoy.

It is interesting to note that although it is becoming increasingly acceptable for women to play male sports (such as soccer), there is reticence in the male camp in adopting these egalitarian views (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006:551). This may be explained by Schmalz and Kerstetter (2006:539): ‘[b]oys and men may also be more sensitive to stigmas associated with their participation choices than girls and women, because sport is widely accepted as being masculine.’

The sex-type behaviour, gender expectations and entrenched stereotypes are pervasive influences in the socialization of children. Schmalz and Kerstetter (2006:551) further that from the age of eight years old a child is aware and affected by these gender prescriptions. Thus, as seen above, the social learning perspective posits that gender expectations are not intrinsic but are learnt. Gender socialization aids in the identity formation of the child.

The researcher is of the opinion that gender specific behaviour and sports participation fosters a sense of camaraderie and social acceptance, especially for boys. ‘For boys, any indication of femininity, or straying from masculine norms would raise questions about their masculinity’ (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006:551). This would be devastating in the face of peer pressure and the fledgling sense of identity of the child in the middle childhood years.
As seen above in the definition of sport (Coakley, 2001:21), skill is required and the competitive nature of the activities presents opportunities for mastery. Thus, the child develops a sense of self efficacy from past success or failure on the sports field, peer assessment and feedback from the sports coach. The researcher is of the opinion that the sports field is a robust arena for modelling and that this modelling has a great influence on the child’s sense of self.

The researcher has seen in practice that primary school children take sports seriously, expending much effort. In this regard, peers provide both a method for social comparison and a model of desirable abilities. This can be extended to the professional platform. Exposure to international and local sports are mainly through mass media. Sports stars may possess both referent and social power in the eyes of the child.

It must be noted that ‘[s]ocial theorists propose that children pay greater attention to some models than others, and that a number of factors influence what they do on the basis of what they learn’ (Durkin, 1995:23). This essential aspect of social learning must be considered as the child is bombarded with an extended global social environment through the media. The role of the media in the life of the child ensues.

2.5.2. Mass Media and Gender

‘The popular mass media are an especially important influence within many contemporary Western societies, and there is evidence that television in particular can play a major role in children’s gender socialisation’ (Barrett & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005:9). But it is important to be cognizant that ‘… people do not passively absorb gender role conceptions from whatever influence happens to impinge upon them… The development of gender role conceptions is a construction rather than simply a wholesale incorporation of what has been socially transmitted’ (Bussey & Bandura, 1999:689).

The selectivity of role models is coloured by gender knowledge, children are sensitive to same-sex models whom they believe ‘… can provide personally relevant information’ (Durkin, 2005:143). As stated above by Golombok and Hines
stereotypes are more influential than actual people in the acquisition of sex-typed behaviour. Bussey and Bandura (1999:685) stress that ‘… the mass media provides pervasive modelling of gendered roles and conduct.’

‘[M]edia are important as a collective representation of what gender means and as a guide to what is valued within a society’ (Durkin, 2005:154). Thus, media is a microcosm of society, although somewhat skewed. Societal prescriptions and expectations are both overtly and covertly conveyed through the media. ‘Nearly every media portrayal, scene, and storyline conveys a message about “normative” and expected behaviors of women and men’ (Ward, 2005:65).

Ward (2005:69) stresses that ‘[w]ith their ability to amplify or neglect aspects of the social world, the American media are a potent socialization force.’ On a biological level, regardless of the programming content, ‘… exposure to television images has been found to stimulate the brain and thus may well shape its wiring and development’ (Ward, 2005:64). It is frightening that children ‘… spend as much time using media as they do in school, with family or friends’ (Wartella, O’Keefe & Scantlin, 2000:6).

The researcher is of the opinion that apart from the stereotypes depicted in media, fantasy and fiction are presented together with non-fiction, leaving the viewer in doubt over what is real and what is not. Wartella et al. (2000:13) state that popular media presents ‘… a combustible formula in which violence has no context, causes no bad consequences and results in no remorse.’ Thus, media often presents vicarious reinforcement of skewed norms and behaviour.

This is not limited to the violence seen in the media. Distefan, Pierce and Gilpin (2004:1241) found that ‘… smoking by stars in movies significantly increases the risk of future smoking among adolescent girls who have never smoked, independent of effects arising from other tobacco advertising and promotional practices.’ Here again, the long-term detrimental effects of smoking are not portrayed in the media. The child or adolescent sees the movie star smoke and it looks glamorous, with no negative outcomes.
The discussion above has given a brief description of the wide-ranging effects of exposure to mass media. Ward (2005:65) stresses that ‘…media use is also likely to contribute to shaping children’s beliefs about themselves and about those around them.’ However, it was stressed that children do not just passively absorb the media influences. As Durkin (2005:157) furthers, ‘…rather than being the outcome of passive exposure to the mass media, children’s developing gender role understanding guides how they select among, attend to, and process information in the media.’ Two factors impacting on processing of media stimuli will be discussed below.

2.5.2.1. Additional Factors Regarding Media Impact

Although media influence provides a strong source for modelling, as stated above, the child does not inertly absorb every stimulus. ‘Children don’t experience media in a vacuum… immediate family, such as parents and siblings, heavily influence what children take away from the viewing experience’ (Wartella et al., 2000:11). Thus, the family environment which includes family values, norms and beliefs colours the child’s interpretation and absorption of mass media.

An added aspect in the impact of role models encompasses all opportunities for observational learning, not only those from the mass media. Lockwood, Jordan and Kunda (2002:854) propose that the inspirational impact of role models often depends on the goals pursued by the individual encountering the role model. Thus, people are prone ‘…to be inspired by positive role models, who represent a desired self, when they are bent on pursuing success, and by negative role models, who represent a feared self, when they are intent on avoiding failure’ (Lockwood et al., 2002:854).

The researcher views the above research through the lens of social learning. Lockwood et al. (2002:860) found that ‘… role models are more likely to enhance motivation when they encourage the adoption of strategies that one is especially ready to implement, due to one’s salient regulatory focus.’

As seen above, the enactment and integration of observational learning depends on the level of self efficacy of the child since ‘… children are more likely to model behavior that they believe they can master’ (Golombok & Hines, 2002:130). Thus, the
researcher views the self regulatory focus of the child as impacting on his/her efficacy beliefs. Together, these aspects impact on the effect of the role model. Furthermore, the researcher is fascinated by the possible link between the efficacy level of the child and the choice of positive or negative role models. This is beyond the scope of this research study but may be considered for further research.

2.6. Conclusion

The child, age 11, jumps out of his mother’s car as they reach the school gate. She can see his face light up as he sees his friends. With a quick ‘bye’ to his mother, he slings his bag over his lanky frame and runs to where his friends are waiting for him. The mother slowly pulls away as the sound of laughter fades into the school building. The mother wonders what happened to the 6 year old boy, tugging on her hand, as she coaxed him into his classroom. This morning, his greeting was barely audible as he got out the car, without even a backward glance. The mother smiles in wonderment over what a few short years can bring, the miracle of child development.

The school years are an exciting time of rapid child development. These years are the corridor to adolescence and mature social functioning. The child in the middle childhood years is exposed to a broadening social environment. Each interaction within this environment allows for learning – observing, thinking, absorbing and integrating the norms, values, beliefs and behaviour espoused by society. This is the process of socialization leading to enhanced social functioning.

The example above sees the mother taking a step back as primary socialization agent. The child will now spend a large part of his day with peers and teachers. He will probably watch TV after he finishes his homework and then charge off to soccer practice. The social world of this child presents many opportunities for social learning. He is exposed to many social influences.

The chapter above highlighted the many agents in the socialization of the child in middle childhood. The importance of self efficacy beliefs, as a dynamic product of the process of social learning, was stressed. These efficacy beliefs encompass all levels of the child’s functioning. The child learns from his/her environment the extent of
his/her capabilities. Pajares (2005:243) stated: ‘… it is not simply a matter of how capable you are; it is also a matter of how capable you believe you are.’

Thus, the beliefs and aspirations that the mother entertains for her son, the assessment of the teacher about his ability, the view that his friends’ hold of him, his favourite soccer player performing in a big game – all impart messages to the child. It is the interpretation of these messages by the child that impacts on the child's self beliefs, ‘… others’ perceptions of the self – affects us but does not simply shape us’ (Durkin, 1995:298).
CHAPTER THREE: THE EMPIRICAL STUDY

3.1. Introduction

The previous chapter provided the theoretical context of the research study. Thus, providing the framework within which the findings can be viewed. The following chapter presents the actual findings of the study. The chapter refreshes the reader with a summary of the research methodology as the point of departure. The literature presented in the previous chapter provides the theoretical substantiation integrated in the interpretation of the findings below.

This chapter focuses on the findings regarding the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years.

3.2. Research Methodology

3.2.1. Research Approach

The qualitative approach was chosen for this study. Babbie and Mouton (1998:270) state that the ‘... primary goal of studies using this approach is defined as describing and understanding rather than explaining human behaviour ...[Q]ualitative researchers attempt always to study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves.’ Thus, the aim of such idiographic studies is ‘... to understand social life and the meaning that people attach to everyday life’ (Fouché & Delport, 2002a:79).

It was more appropriate to use a qualitative method with the children in this study rather than a quantitative method. This method allowed the researcher to achieve rapport with the children and gain a deeper understanding of the sample. The qualitative approach was more flexible and open. It allowed the researcher to identify the participants’ values and beliefs that underlie the area of interest (Fouché & Delport, 2002a:79). Rich, subjective data was yielded regarding the topic of role models and the effect that they have on the personal beliefs, norms and behaviour of the children.

3.2.2. Type of Research and Research Design

The research type was that of applied research because the study concentrated on a phenomenon existing in reality. The applied research study sought to benefit the specific ‘client system’ (Williams et al., 1995:52). The insight provided by the research results has practical implications owing to the enhanced understanding of children in this specific developmental period of middle childhood.
The research design or strategy is the overall plan through which the research question will be answered. The research strategy best suited for this study was phenomenology, the aim being ‘… to understand and interpret the meaning that subjects give to their everyday lives … the product of the research is a description of the essence of the experiences being studied’ (Fouché, 2002b:273). The study aimed to understand how primary school children experience role models in their lives.

3.2.3. Data Collection Method

The data collection method used in the study was the unstructured one-on-one interview. Tutty et al. (1996:55) state that the unstructured interview is considered the best way of gaining understanding of the perceptions held by people. The desired data was personal and individualized, the unstructured interview allowed for the open and honest expression of the viewpoint of the child.

3.2.4. Research Population, Sample and Sampling Method

The population is ‘… the totality of persons, events, organisation units … with which the research problem is concerned’ (Strydom & Venter, 2002:199). The specific population in this case was primary school children in middle childhood from the specific school from which the researcher drew the sample.

A sample is a small representation of the population. The non-probability sampling method employed in the study was that of purposive sampling because ‘… it illustrates some feature or process that is of interest for a particular study’ (Strydom & Delport, 2002:334). The researcher and the grade 6 class teachers selected 8 respondents, 4 boys and 4 girls. The sample age was between 11 and 13 years old and spanned the academic spectrum. Keen verbal skills were also a criterion for inclusion in the sample to ensure rich, subjective data.

3.2.5. Data Analysis
The aim of data analysis is to look for patterns and trends that reappear within a single interview or among various interviews (Greeff, 2002:318). Open coding procedures were used in this study, which ‘… pertains to the naming and categorising of phenomena through close examination of data’ (De Vos, 2002:346). ‘As categories of meaning emerge, the researcher searches for those that have internal convergence and external divergence’ (De Vos, 2002:344). The rest of the data is then organized under the main themes identified.

The researcher thoroughly read through the data, the interview transcripts, many times in identifying the common themes and sub-themes presented in this chapter. The literature has been integrated with the researcher’s interpretation of the findings.

### 3.3. Findings and Interpretation

The researcher presents below the findings of the research study and an interpretation of the data. The researcher refers to the interviews with the respondents as, for example: interview 2 or –2 referring to respondent 2. It must be noted that the allocation of numbers was random and indicates the order in which the interviews took place. The interviews with the 8 respondents, the 4 boys and 4 girls, yielded the following themes and sub-themes as condensed in the following diagrams:

![FIGURE 1: THEME ONE AND SUB-THEMES](attachment:figure1.png)
THEME TWO: Peer relationships

Sub-theme 2.1. Peer role models

Sub-theme 2.2. Social comparison

Sub-theme 2.3. Negative influences

Sub-theme 2.4. Social efficacy

FIGURE 2: THEME TWO AND SUB-THEMES
THEME THREE:
Teacher-student relationship

Sub-theme 3.1.
Teacher as role model

Sub-theme 3.2.
Other teacher role models

Sub-theme 3.3.
The grade one teacher

Sub-theme 3.4.
Negative impact of the teacher

FIGURE 3: THEME THREE AND SUB-THEMES

THEME FOUR:
Parent-child relationship

Sub-theme 4.1.
Parent praise and motivation

Sub-theme 4.2.
Parents and self efficacy

Sub-theme 4.3.
Parental control

FIGURE 4: THEME FOUR AND SUB-THEMES
3.3.1. THEME ONE: KEY CONCEPTS

The focus of the study was on the impact of role models on the self efficacy of the school child. Thus, the key concepts of the topic, as evident in the data, will be the point of departure in presenting the findings of the study. It was important for the researcher to ascertain the understanding of the respondents regarding the topic. The researcher noted the emphasis that the respondents placed on academic efficacy beliefs above all other areas of functioning. The remaining themes explore the link
between these key concepts, namely, the role models (or significant relationships) and the efficacy beliefs of the child.

3.3.1.1. SUB-THEME: DEFINITION OF ROLE MODEL

The respondents defined, in their opinion, the concept of role model:

… someone that you look up to, someone that you like want to be like. – 8

Somebody who you can look up to and say “I want to be like them” and know what they do… want to be them themselves. – 6

Like someone that would help you to like, look up, do something when you older and like show you what to do. – 4

Respondent 1 identified the motivational effect that, in her mind, defines a role model:

I think a role model is someone that like you can look up to and you really that they’ve like done something right… they a good influence on you… they like even if they had a hard like they still like made it to the top and they successful and they happy and they clever. – 1

The need for similarity and identification is central to the effectiveness of modelled behaviour. This was seen in the definition of a role model below:

I look up to people how they care and they share and… that almost do the same stuff that I like to do cos we go well together. – 2

It is evident in the findings that a role model possesses something to which the respondent aspires:

I look up to, um people who I see try a lot, they may not succeed in it, but they try a lot and when they get their results of something, they’re not upset with what they get cos they know they tried. – 5

Talent makes it a role model. – 3
The findings concur with the definition of a role model as ‘… somebody to be copied: somebody who is regarded as somebody to look up to and often as an example to emulate’ (Encarta World English Dictionary, 2004). It was evident to the researcher that the respondents viewed a role model as someone inspiring emulation.

Role models are integral to the process of observational learning. Durkin (1995:25) states that ‘[a]s a result of modeling and reinforcement, the self incorporates societal standards and monitors whether behaviors are in line with adopted standards.’ Owens (2002:21) stressed that ‘[c]hildren learn from models how the observed behavior might aid or hinder them in fulfilling their needs in the future.’

The researcher noted the child’s need to relate to the role model. Similarity as a means of identification was expressed by respondent 2 in his definition of a role model. As will be seen in the theme on peer relationships, identification with the role model fosters the belief that ‘if he can do it, so can I!’ (Pajares, 2005:346). The above definitions view role models as socialization agents inspiring growth and aspiration.

3.3.1.2. SUB-THEME: ACADEMIC EFFICACY BELIEFS

Pajares (2005:243) stated: ‘… it is not simply a matter of how capable you are; it is also a matter of how capable you believe you are.’ The following presents the academic efficacy beliefs, those capability beliefs, expressed by the respondents:

... I know I’m top of the class… – 2

I like being at the top… I push myself just enough to make sure that I’m near where I want to be… I do my best I have to do my best. – 1

The belief in ability was seen below in the notion of ‘what I put in is what I get out!’:

... I’m trying my best in my tests and I’m getting good marks. – 6

I’ll learn hard and it, it will show in my marks if I’ve learnt hard… you can be proud of yourself… – 5
... academically I’m quite good at school... Just trying to be me and like being the best I can do. – 8

The researcher found that only respondent 4 expressed disappointment at his current achievement level:

I’m not doing as well as I can... I can do much better if want to, but sometimes I’m just, I’m just too lazy. – 4

The researcher was impressed by the honesty of the above statement. The researcher found that the belief that the respondents had in their capabilities was undisputable. Although the confidence exuded in the above findings was palpable, the researcher was uncertain how the respondents would respond in the face of failure. ‘This is because self-efficacy is not so much about learning how to succeed as it is about learning how to persevere when one does not succeed’ (Pajares, 2005:345). One of the sub-themes of parent-child relationships below alludes to this but it is the parents response to the child’s failure that is expressed by the respondents rather than the respondent’s resultant efficacy beliefs.

The emphasis on academic efficacy beliefs, above other areas of functioning, may be owing to the slant of the questions during the actual interview. However, the researcher is of the opinion that academics is an important area of pursuit for the school child. Achievement in this area of functioning is quantifiable and thus tangible for the child in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development (Piaget, 1929, 1952, 1983). In addition, formal schooling emphasizes the acquisition of foundational academic skills (Kaplan, 1998:29). Thus, the focus of the child reflects that of his/her environment.

3.3.2. THEME TWO: PEER RELATIONSHIPS
This theme focuses on the impact of peer relationships on the child in the middle childhood years. ‘As children age, they begin spending more time in the company of their peers than in the company of their parents’ (Burton et al., 2003:246). The findings emphasised the importance of peers and peer influence in the life of the child.

### 3.3.2.1. SUB-THEME: PEER ROLE MODELS

The following details the peer role models held by the respondents:

…he’s very clever… they think he’s got rheumatoid arthritis…but it’s very difficult. Also he’s shown that you can do things if you might… have an illness or whatever, doesn’t… mean that you not, that you stupid or whatever… he won this quiz. – 6

Perseverance and fortitude in the face of challenge was modelled to respondent 6 and this enhanced his own efficacy beliefs since the peer inspired him. This was mirrored in interview 8:

I know someone and she used to come to my swimming training she had no arms, like half arms, half legs and she was brilliant! …you would have thought that she had arms and legs… just because you have a disability or
you are a bit disabled doesn’t mean that you can’t do stuff that everyone else can do. – 8

The following respondents indicated the aspects in their peer role models eliciting notions of aspiration:

… there is like this one girl in the class and she’s like so like relaxed and she’s so organized… she like would never tell a lie… she’s so concerned about other people that she’s so sweet and caring and I like really like look up to her for that … she’s like always doing the right thing she’s very concerned about doing the right thing… well, she’s definitely made me more organized… – 1

There is this one girl… I admire her because she has so much knowledge and she’s always on the right track, like she gets things done so quickly… and everything’s like in the, in her order like everything’s in their place. And I, I feel at this moment, this year, especially this month, I feel very disorganised. – 7

Well, the one guy in my class, in the class he’s really good at cricket and at the same time as I look up to him to help me sometimes. – 4

I know someone who’d like… she’s not a “wannabe” at all. Like she wants to be who she is, she wants people to like her for who she is, not what they want her to be. – 8

Burton et al. (2003:236) state that ‘… peers influence each other not only through direct exchanges and reinforcement, but also through modelling of others engaged in prosocial and conflict situations…’ The findings above highlight the power of vicarious reinforcement in peer relationships. The researcher noted that both respondent 1 and 7 were sensitive to the effect of their peer role models – they admitted that the modelled behaviour of the peers was something to which they aspired. The notion of aspiration and the desire for emulation was evident in the
findings ‘… a child may model another’s behavior because they admire and want to be like them’ (Burton et al., 2003:238).

Burton et al. (2003:238), based on Berndt (1996), refer to this peer influence as referent power, ‘… children often try to become friends with other children they perceive as popular, athletic, or outstanding in some way.’ Bandura (1998) furthers that peers with more experience, knowledge and competence are models of efficacious behaviour and thinking. The researcher was aware that it was the peers held in high esteem by the respondents that effected a noted influence. The researcher noted that the respondents were conscious of this influence.

3.3.2.2. SUB-THEME: SOCIAL COMPARISON

The researcher has incorporated the aspects of peer influence and feedback under the sub-theme of social comparison. During the middle childhood years, peer interactions are more frequent and more valued to the child. Peer relationships provide the forum for social comparison which is a vehicle of social learning. Peers model attitudes, beliefs and behaviour for the child, impacting on the self efficacy beliefs of the child.

‘Through social comparisons, the social environment affects not only our self-concepts and goals but the very framework within which we organize our understandings of the social world’ (Durkin, 1995:322). Peers provide the lenses through which the child views the world.

… you get compliments like something “wow that was such a brilliant thing!” or “Geez well done, like that was a brilliant, you got such a high mark”… that gives you more of a push… I’m now maybe I really I am good at this, or like, it’s like your friends they won’t lie to you… – 8

… the people who aren’t jealous, like when I get a good mark or something, they’ll go ‘Well done, that’s amazing!’ or something…that helps and um, and also knowing that your family and friends are proud of you it also help you to be proud of yourself and not to be sad about yourself and not to know you could have tried harder or something. – 5
The researcher noted, from the findings, the importance of peer feedback and the motivation this acknowledgement provided the respondents. Respondent 3 added insight into the value of social comparison:

\[\text{…maybe even a bit of competitiveness is also good, it kind of pushes you.} \quad \text{– 3}\]

The findings below further the link between peer relationships and the enhancement of self efficacy beliefs.

\[\text{Friends influence can also make a big thing cos it gives you more confidence. I’m sure your friends give you more confidence than sports players to go ahead and do that, do that, play that sport. And I think that friends make also a big difference… help me in my own confidence, confidence by possibly even being my friend. – 3}\]

\[\text{… well it’s shown me (referring to his peer who has overcome physical disabilities) that I should believe in my myself even when I think like I’m stupid or whatever, I’ve got to think, well I’ve done lots of other things and, I mean, I can still do more! … I’ve just got to try… and push myself as far as I can do, do the best that I can do in the situation I’m in. – 6}\]

The respondents below acknowledged the direct influence of their peers on their own performance:

\[\text{They influence me to do well in school, I’ve got, I see one friend does well in an exam. I also try do well… cos they did well you also wanna do well.} \quad \text{– 3}\]

\[\text{You can do something as well as your friends. – 4}\]

The findings highlight the importance of peer relationships in the framing of the achievement motivation of the child. The researcher noted that the peer influence did
not necessary involve direct interaction. As Pajares (2005:346) states: ‘[o]bserving the successes and failures of peers perceived as similar in capability contributes to beliefs in one’s own capabilities (“if he can do it, so can I!”)’. This concurs with the assertion of Bandura (1998) that ‘… the greater the assumed similarity the more persuasive are the models’ successes and failures.’ Pajares (2005:347) states that ‘…students who model excellence can imbue other students with the belief that they too can achieve that excellence.’

The researcher is of the opinion that peers, above all other models, provide a realistic model for emulation. Furthermore, the support and companionship fostered in the school years provides the context for personal growth. Social comparison is not a vehicle for producing clones. Durkin (1995:295) states that ‘[w]e need other people in order to determine what is distinctive about our own self.’ Middle childhood is the period where the self concept becomes more individuated – the child sees him/herself as unique and different from others (Ashford et al., 2001:317). Thus, peers are one of the key role players fostering the growth of the child.

3.3.2.3. SUB-THEME: NEGATIVE INFLUENCES

It has ‘… become clear that not all peer interactions and influence is positive’ (Burton et al., 2003:235). The following shows the insight of the respondents into the negative influence of their peers.

I don’t al… always feel good influences…sometimes it’s bad influences. – 3

So she doesn’t exactly have an I influence on me coz she isn’t in my class, she’s from the other class… but like say her group of friends she’s got an influence on like, lets say, that I’m friendly with, so like, then like they’ll like all become all bossy… makes us turn against each other and like then we like start becoming like horrible to each other… in the long run it like will influence us to like talk badly not really like directly. – 1

… they told me, when their parents come home from their interview that they are bad influences to me and the children. And ya, like that they so
they try me and sometimes when they think they want to do something bad they have to tell me to do it. And I say “No!” and they get in trouble for doing it. – 4

The researcher observed that most of the respondents were unaware of the pervasive and often negative nature of peer influence. Many of the respondents were unable to respond directly to this question. Although respondent 1 identified the negative influence with its effects, she asserted that she was not directly influenced.

The researcher perceived a rigid view regarding the notion of peer influence. This was seen in interview 4 where the respondent considered himself immune to the shenanigans of his peers. Respondent 5 communicated this clearly:

I don’t give into peer pressure at all! – 5

The researcher is of the opinion that peer influence, negative or positive, is of intangible nature. Children in middle childhood are in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. Children are more organized, logical and flexible than in early childhood (Berk, 2005:428) but ‘… they can perform operations only on images of tangible objects and actual events’ (Weiten, 2001:449). Thus, awareness of peer influences may be too complex a notion for the child.

The researcher is also of the opinion that the desire for peer acceptance may hinder any negative assertions made regarding the peer group. Towards the end of middle childhood, the age of the respondents, ‘[i]nterpersonal relationships are perceived as constituting the core of self…’ (Owens, 2002:457). Peers fulfil the human need for companionship which includes the feeling of connectedness and social involvement (Ashford et al., 2001:330). Thus, avoiding peer rejection is a realistic pursuit of the child.

3.3.2.4. SUB-THEME: SOCIAL EFFICACY
The researcher broadly defines social efficacy, in this context, as the perception of the child regarding his/her evaluation of him/herself in the eyes of his/her peers.

…they (my friends) like me and, they, they respect my choices and my viewing of everything... So often when they’re in a fight or something, they’ll come to me and say ‘Look I don’t know how to resolve this, what must I do?’... I’ll try to give them the best, the best answer I can and the one that will most probably work out and help them... my personality is definitely a leader, not follower, definitely... I’ll think I’m a caring one (friend). – 5

... but a lot of people look up to me...because... I’m good at sport, and I’m friendly and I’ve got a good sense of humour and... I, I’m cle... I help them in their work and...like if they stuck on a question... and I stick up for them. – 2

Well my best friend she also said to me, um ‘your life’s always in place’... my friends think I’m a good dancer and swimmer. – 7

Well personally I think I’m quite a good friend...I don’t want them (my friends) to see anything that I’m not, like, I want them to see me. – 8

It was interesting to note that the respondents communicated only positive perceptions. The researcher noted that ‘[c]hildren’s descriptions of themselves become more stable and more comprehensive in middle childhood’ (Kaplan, 1998:242). The descriptions were mainly about skills and capabilities rather than intrinsic characteristics, providing further proof of the concrete operational stage of cognitive development.

The researcher is of the opinion that the social efficacy beliefs held by the child play an important role in child development. Ashford et al. (2001:330) state that ‘...assessment of children’s social competence by their peers is a more powerful predictor of later behavior problems than assessment by parents, teachers or mental health practitioners.’ The significance of peer relationships and the power of peer
influence provide peers with great influence. It is not the view or assessment of the child held by others but rather the child’s perception of this view that wields power over the child.

In summary, peer relationships serve important functions for the developing child. Most importantly, the findings highlight that peers provide realistic models for emulation. Peers are integral to the identity formation and efficacy beliefs of the child. The significance of these relationships in the middle childhood years was seen. Peers impact the child’s view of him/herself, others and the surrounding world.

3.3.3. THEME THREE: TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

FIGURE 3: THEME THREE AND SUB-THEMES

The onset of formal schooling is marked by the child leaving the clutches of the parent and entering the classroom. A child spends many hours in the classroom under the charge of the teacher. ‘During the crucial formative period of children’s lives, the school functions as the primary setting for the cultivation and social validation of cognitive capabilities… their knowledge and thinking skills are continually tested, evaluated, and socially compared’ (Bandura, 1997a:175). This theme focuses on the crucial role of the teacher as socialization agent within the structure of formal schooling. The teacher role was seen to have a direct and indirect impact on the growing child.
3.3.3.1. SUB-THEME: TEACHER AS ROLE MODEL

The following indicate the views regarding teachers held in high esteem:

In grade 3 we had Mrs X, she’s an excellent, excellent teacher, now she’s been teaching for ages… if I’d like, I had to be a teacher I’d want to be a teacher just like her. – 1

she (Mrs X) was just… my best teacher I’ve ever had. – 6

Miss Y, like for me she is the most amazing teacher like if every year I had a teacher like her I’d be like blessed! – 8

… in Grade 3 I had a teacher (not Mrs X) that has given me a lot of encouragement… she was a very nice teacher… she really made my life good in that year. – 3

The researcher noticed that Mrs X, a grade 3 teacher, was mentioned by a few of the respondents. The following are the characteristics in this teacher that stood out for them:

… she’s also very fair. – 6

she’s like firm and strict but everyone loves her… if like anything’s ever bothering you she’ll say like come to me I’m always here after class you can speak to me… she like taught you a lot. – 1

… she was, like also a very good teacher and like she told me stuff that are just like random you know that I still have like today. – 8

The findings suggest that a good teacher, according to the respondents, is both compassionate and firm. ‘[T]eachers cannot educate students in whom they have no confidence and students cannot learn from teachers in whom they have no trust’
Mrs X impacted the self efficacy beliefs of the child, this impact was not limited to the academic realm:

… she definitely made you feel … that as much as you feel you can’t, you can!... she’d always like tell us like famous things… she’d make you realize so much more than there is. – 1

… she taught me that you mustn’t be embarrassed if you do something right and everyone else thinks it’s wrong… also she used to give us these little certificates and like on it she used to write what we got it for… “I think you’re very good at maths, I think you should go do some extra maths cos you’re really capable of doing it” like she would say it but not in a way… she, like, hinted to you. – 8

… she helped me make me feel like I can or something if I try to like, it’s not I can’t do anything. – 6

The researcher notes that the children were sensitive to the confidence that the teacher had in them. The researcher suggests, based on the findings, that the firmness identified by the respondents was the high level of efficacy of Mrs X. Her compassion was the positive regard communicated to the respondents. Teachers frame and colour the many learning experiences of the child in the classroom. The findings show the long-term effect of the teacher impacting the self efficacy beliefs of the children.
3.3.3.2. SUB-THEME: OTHER TEACHER ROLE MODELS

As stated above, the researcher sees the teacher as moulding many of the learning experiences of the child. Respondent 5 provided an important insight on the sub-theme of the teacher as role model:

I would have to say all my teachers (made impression on me) cos they taught me things... like, told me if I was doing anything wrong or right and they didn’t bring me up but they helped me to that other level every year... when I went up they helped to be on that same level that year and then to go up the next year, so like I wouldn’t be in Grade 6 if I didn’t have my Grade 5 teacher or Grade 4, obviously! – 5

The researcher was impressed by the maturity of this insight regarding the importance of teachers in the continuum of child development. This finding suggests that there is not one overriding influence in the life of a child, rather the sum of the interactions are integrated into the developing self concept and self efficacy beliefs of the child. The development of the self concept is ‘… an inherently social activity’ (Durkin, 1995:295). To this end, '[c]hildren are engaged in interactions with more mature beings who are very interested in them, and who provide both context and guidance’ (Durkin, 1995:295). As authority figures, teachers provide a framework for the growing of a child.

The following are characteristics of different teachers who provided this framework for growth and left an impression on the child. It must be noted that these findings refer to different teachers unless otherwise indicated.

… she just teaches it to you that you want to listen... she understands you... and she understands that everyone’s on a different level... she makes it really interesting. And she doesn’t make it like we doing it for her you know it’s for like even us! – 8

… she actually pretty much liked children a lot... She wasn’t so strict, she gave the people second chances, made me believe in myself if I forgot
something, that, that I can definitely do it now, she made, if I was behind in work she’d, I’d know that I can catch up easily – 3

… she’ll be disciplined and, um, she'll give us like a second chance and that and she’s very funny. – 7 (referring to Mrs Z)

I work best with actually the teacher I have now, her kind of personality she’s very efficient… she explains things thoroughly to you if you don’t understand she’ll explain it again and she’ll, if you like step out of line or something, she’ll put you back in line and focus you… – 5 (referring to Mrs Z)

Respondent 7 identified two other different teachers whose characteristics stood out for her:

… she’s very sweet and she’s also disciplined.

… she was like very organised... from all the teachers the, um, the knowledge… you know it’s nice learning. – 7

The researcher found once again that the respondents identified structure and discipline as favourable in their teachers. Compassion and understanding were also seen as ideal. The researcher extends her view expressed regarding Mrs X in the previous sub-theme. Discipline signifies high teacher efficacy and compassion is the positive regard communicated to the respondents.

It was observed by the researcher that such teacher characteristics enhanced the self efficacy beliefs of the children. Respondent 3 clearly stated that the teacher helped him believe in his own capabilities. Respondent 8 identified the notion of self motivation fostered by the teacher. The researcher noted that all the respondents gained encouragement from the teacher.

Ashford *et al.* (2001:355) present relevant findings of a study conducted by Madon, Jussim and Eccles (1997). It was found that teachers who have high hopes regarding
the student’s ability can raise the test score significantly (30 percentiles), however, underestimating student’s achievement potential had a marginal effect (10 percentiles) (Ashford et al., 2001:355). Thus, positive encouragement and positive regard has a great impact on the achievement level of the child. This positive regard, together with the requisite respect towards the teacher, enhances the student’s motivation and fosters a healthy teacher-student relationship (Davis & Dupper, 2004:183).

3.3.3.3. SUB-THEME: THE GRADE ONE TEACHER

Two of the respondents expressed the importance of the teacher at the inception of middle childhood:

... the most important year of my life (grade one) and if you’re a Grade 1 teacher you have to be a proper teacher, you can’t be a teacher that’s firm and strict - you’ve got to be in, nice...but you’ve got to consider the children that they’re very young and this is probably the most important year of their life, cos it’s the year when they learn to do maths, read... where they learn to do everything that’s very much needed in their life. – 3

I’d say that when I was much younger those teachers seemed...the most important teachers in my, cos they, they didn’t bring me up but um they taught me the foundation...Like the Grade 1 teachers, the Grade 0 teachers...helped to like, not come into the world but see the world sort of through different eyes... you have more respect for your teachers when you are younger because your teachers when you’re young, ya because they taught you things, especially in Grade 1!... in Grade 1, it’s a very hard year cos you’re learning all new things and your brain hasn’t learned to be... to be focused in class and stuff. – 5

Both respondents identified grade one as the foundation for future learning. The assertion that this is a sensitive and integral year was expressed. The importance of enhanced teacher efficacy was seen as favourable to these children.
The child entering formal schooling is introduced to a system where skill and capability in many areas of functioning gains emphasis. Bandura (1997a:242) states that a student with self doubt regarding his/her academic abilities, will be sensitive to teacher effect.

The findings above indicate to the researcher, the awareness of young children as more susceptible to teacher influence. The reason for this is the young child’s unstable sense of efficacy, informal peer structures and lack of social comparison as a source of information about his/her capabilities (Bandura, 1997a:242). The researcher furthers that the teacher plays a central role in the fledgling development of the self efficacy beliefs of the child at this sensitive stage of growth.

3.3.3.4. SUB-THEME: NEGATIVE IMPACT OF THE TEACHER

Certain respondents identified teachers who were not positive role models:

What my teacher makes me believe in myself is that I’m more correct in that I don’t like school… a lot of the time I get in trouble when I don’t need to… the teachers especially always look up to my more mischievous side… so they always think it’s my fault. – 2

I had a teacher and she wasn’t disciplined so the like class ran amok and everything and that was like horrible… I would not want to be around her. – 7

one teacher I didn’t look up to… it was just the way she treated me and my friends, more my friends…always like not helped them or shouted … if they wanted help or whatever. – 6

The findings show that unfairness and a lack of fair discipline is viewed as unfavourable in the eyes of the child. The researcher noted that only three of the eight respondents expressed negativity regarding their teachers. The researcher does not
believe that the other respondents never had negative role models. However, the positive experiences may have been overarching in their minds.

In conclusion of the theme of teacher-student relationships, the importance of this relationship is clear. The teacher plays an integral role in the learning and growing of the child. ‘Teachers underestimate the powerful impact of their attitudes and beliefs on student success’ (Davis & Dupper, 2004:184). This may be viewed in relation to the efficacy beliefs of the teacher and the regard in which he/she holds the students. The teacher-child relationship effects the nature of the child’s learning experiences (Davis & Dupper, 2004:183).

3.3.4. THEME FOUR: PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIP

The family and especially the parents are the forum for the initial efficacy experiences of the child. The child uses the social environment in gaining knowledge of his/her abilities in different areas of functioning (Bandura, 1998). It is the family that provides the secure base from which the child goes forth to explore the world.

Middle childhood presents a shift in the role of the parent. The parents who were once idealized as role models by the young child ‘… are now seen as fallible human beings who can be, and often are, arbitrary and wrong’ (Kaplan, 1998:243). The child still relies on the parent not only for his/her physical needs but also his/her emotional
validation and security. The theme below focuses on the impact of the parent on the efficacy beliefs of the child in the middle childhood years.

3.3.4.1. SUB-THEME: PARENT PRAISE AND MOTIVATION

The following reveals the attitude and reaction perceived by the respondents regarding their parents (as perceived and transmitted by the respondents). These reactions were related to academic achievement:

… she wants me to try to do my best at everything. Not be like, the best, but do my best… if I like, get like a test and I’m like complaining that I only got 80 instead of 90 she’d say ‘there’s nothing wrong with 80 and 80’s a very good mark!’ – 1

she says like so you “no one’s good at everything”… so whatever you can do is the best that you can do… my mom says she doesn’t care about the results just the work that goes into it. – 8

… my mom always says to me ‘try, do your best not try best…’ – 7

Well they push me on to learn all my work harder… they just tell me “you can do better if you really want to”. – 4

… by not putting me down! … let’s say I didn’t get what I wanted for my test, she’d say ‘Well at least you know you tried’… and she’ll say ‘Well done, I’m proud of you…’ – 5

The common theme evident in the findings was that of praising the effort expended and invested by the child. The words of encouragement of the parents expressed this assertion.

When an individual is verbally persuaded that he/she possesses the capabilities with which to succeed, he/she is likely to mobilize and sustain greater effort (Bandura, 1998). The researcher observed the importance of the parent in the achievement level of the child. Although the role of the parent has changed from early childhood, the impact of the parent is still great. The reaction elicited from the parent moulds the child’s evaluation of his/her ability – his/her self efficacy.
The researcher is of the opinion that it is the nature of the praise offered by the parent that moulds the efficacy beliefs of the child. Praising ability fosters a rigid view of ability as an unchangeable trait. ‘[E]ffort related praise may lead children to focus on the process of their work and the possibilities for learning and improvement that hard work may offer’, to this end failure is seen as a ‘…temporary lapse in effort rather than a deficit in intelligence’ (Mueller & Dweck, 1998:34). Effort-related praise, thus, enhances higher efficacy beliefs and fosters the possibility for self improvement.

3.3.4.2. SUB-THEME: PARENTS AND SELF EFFICACY

Shears and Robinson (2005:65) propose ‘… parental beliefs as having a direct influence on parental behaviors and that these behaviors are what exert on children’s development.’ It was evident in the findings that parents have a direct impact on the efficacy beliefs of the respondents. Many of the respondents used the word confidence when referring to this effect.

The following point to the impact of parents on the self efficacy beliefs of the respondents:

... she’ll make me feel like I’m clever... she wants me to do my best at everything. – 1

they push me and I do it... It gives me encouragement like I have confidence that I can do well in a test. – 4

...being your parents, no matter who, they help you in your confidence. – 3

The researcher noted the validation that children receive from their parents, as demonstrated below:

... my dad listens to me and he believes me... – 2

... my dad would let me, he understands me, and he, he allows me to do things... He also gives me responsibilities. – 6
Respondent 3 and 5 recognize the vital role that parents play in the life of a child:

And they influence me a lot in my life, probably worth more than sport, probably a lot more than sport… you look up to them, to help you and to keep you alive, to keep you in school, to give you an education, so, ah, so that’s what I like about my parents. – 3

They’re not always there to just give you stuff. They’re there to bring you up, to give you guidance, to send you to the places that they think might help you. To learn, to grow, to become the better person… – 5

The findings all point to the confidence that parents imbue in their children. This is the validation that the respondents received from their parents. This validation enhanced the efficacy beliefs of the children. Respondent 3 and 5 above highlighted the importance of the role of the parent and the power still wielded by the parent.

The researcher found that parental power is still strong in directing the life and achievement of the child. As seen above, parental beliefs outline the course of child development (Shears & Robinson, 2005:65). Although parental beliefs are influential ‘… others’ perceptions of the self – affects us but does not simply shape us’ (Durkin, 1995:298). ‘Parents’ sense of efficacy to promote their children’s academic development and the educational aspirations they hold for them enhance their children’s beliefs in their own academic efficacy and raise their aspirations’ (Bandura et al., 1996: 1207). Thus, the parent’s confidence in the capability of the child effects his/her efficacy beliefs.

3.3.4.3. SUB-THEME: PARENTAL CONTROL

The findings above highlight the role of the parent in the creation and regulation of the efficacy beliefs of the child. The findings below provide greater insight into this process.
During the interview with respondent 2, it was apparent that parental encouragement was a main factor in his high level of achievement. It was evident that this was not always positive encouragement:

If I failed, like, she’d kill me…if I’d get a “B” also she’d get quite angry…
I don’t want to disappoint my parents. – 2

The respondent exhibited a sensitive understanding as to the source of his mother’s own attitude and ensuing belief in him:

… cos my mom had a hard childhood cos her mom died when she was a child… she went with her brother to live in… with like 2 aunts… they used to beat her… she just wanted me to have a better childhood than her, she doesn’t want me to like get the same experience… She’s much stricter than my dad. – 2

The respondent understood the source of the attitude, beliefs and behaviour enacted by his mother. The researcher noted that the mother was identified as the primary motivational force in the child’s achievement. ‘Awareness of the self is prompted in the course of exchanges with others who try to control or influence behavior’ (Durkin, 1995:296).

The researcher is of the opinion that middle childhood is a period for growing independence in the child, aimed at ‘… self-definitions that reflect others’ ascriptions but do not necessarily accept them’ (Durkin, 1995:297). The researcher acknowledged that the respondent is a high achiever. However, there is a danger of fostering a dependence detrimental to the child – the belief that the child is incapable of achieving without direct parent involvement.

The following shows the detrimental effect of parental control:

She likes to sit and hold my hand and check that I did my work… she used to make me feel like she needs to help me with everything. – 6

Respondent 6 also understood the attitude of his mother:
she doesn’t like me doing things… she says that it will be like, um, I’m growing up, she doesn’t want me to grow up… she wants me to still be her little boy! – 6

The dependent relationship maintained by the mother of respondent 6 forced the family to seek professional advice regarding the child’s poor academic achievement. Fortunately, the educational psychologist suggested methods for enhancing the child’s independence and personal responsibility.

In summary, the important role of the parent was emphasised by the respondents. Parental praise and encouragement validates the child and enhances efficacy beliefs. It was clear that the self beliefs of the parent had a direct effect on child development and specifically the efficacy beliefs of the child. Middle childhood is a time where the parent takes a step back as primary socialization agent of the child. Bee and Boyd (2004:301) stress that although ‘… overt attachment behaviors such as clinging and crying are less visible (in the primary school child) … it is easy to lose sight of the fact that children this age are still strongly attached to their parents.’

3.3.5. THEME FIVE: SPORTS AND MEDIA
The empirical study indicated the pervasive impact of the mass media (including public sporting figures) as a source of observational learning. Mass media, rich in sensory stimuli, is a key feature in the social world of the child. The researcher noted the stereotyped norms and behaviour impacting on the socialization of the respondents. The findings below note the importance of public figures as role models and the ensuing effects or absence of effects perceived by the respondents.

### 3.3.5.1. SUB-THEME: SPORTS ROLE MODEL

The researcher found that sportsmen were considered role models in the eyes of the respondents:

... he’s (Aaron Lennon, soccer player) a bit small like I am and he’s only 19... he played for England internationally... you always see him smiling... I like him because he plays in my position sort of. – 2

... he’s (Raphael Madon, tennis player) not really the best but he’s still going to get there, he’s still very young and he’s still can become the best player in the world. – 4

And he (Ronaldinho, soccer player) didn’t even finish school, but he’s probably one of the most talented players in the world. – 3
Ronaldinho is brilliant at soccer and I hope I will be like him but I don’t want to be like his personality. – 8

The researcher noted the importance of the similarity to and relevance of the identified role model. Most of the respondents identified sportsmen playing a common sport to them. This was clearly indicated in interview 2 where the respondent expressed that the player plays in a common position to him.

Respondent 8 was the only respondent to differentiate between the talent of the player versus his/her personality. The respondent indicated that it is the skill and talent of the player to which the individual aspires. This was evident in the other interviews. The researcher noted that it was the skill and perseverance of the sports players that was identified by the respondents and not personality traits.

However, the issue of gender identification was prominent in the findings. The researcher found that the above respondents were male, bar respondent 8. The sporting arena is still replete with gender expectations and stereotypes. ‘For boys, any indication of femininity, or straying from masculine norms would raise questions about their masculinity… Boys and men may also be more sensitive to stigmas associated with their participation choices than girls and women, because sport is widely accepted as being masculine’ (Schmalz & Kerstetter, 2006:539,551).

Thus, the researcher concludes that it is more accepted for females to have an interest in a ‘male’ sport than vice versa. Of interest in this study was the impact that these role models had on the self efficacy beliefs of the respondents.

The findings below show the perceptions of the respondents regarding the impact of sports players:

He never stops trying… He’s small but he’s strong… I’m strong for my size. – 2
The power of observational learning in the enhancement of efficacy beliefs was seen in interview 2. Respondent 3 below recognized sports players as a source for observational learning and the consequent impact on his efficacy beliefs:

… you get great ideas from them also and you can help you a lot… I think these role models influence people a lot… It influences me because it gives me the courage to play sport, it gives me the strength to play sport… I think one day they influence me to be like that… – 3

Respondents 2 and 3, both male, prescribed importance to the role of sports players influencing their own sporting achievement. Sports figures can, thus, be viewed as effecting a mode of social influence. Durkin (2005:143) included the following in defining the modes of social influence: observational learning, enactive experience and direct tuition. The researcher noted that although the respondents did not have a personal relationship with the sports players, these role models were still influential. It was mainly through mass media – TV, internet and newspapers – that the respondents were exposed to these models. The researcher noted that the mass media relies on observation as a means of dissemination.

The findings point to the powerful positive influence of sport stars on the child in the middle childhood. This influence relies on the relevance of the sport to the child. Sports stars provide a model of inspiration and talent. However, the researcher noted that observational learning often bombards the child with indiscriminate stimuli as respondent 3 furthers:

I don’t think it’s entirely good cos it, it brings in, brings in sometimes even drugs… But I’d say that most of the time it’s very very healthy and it’s a good influence to have, it’s a good way to influence people. – 3

The respondent suggests that selectivity is needed in the process of observational learning. The researcher recalled the words of respondent 8 – her wish not to emulate the personality of the sports player. The researcher has seen in experience that children in the middle childhood often manifest a polarized perspective. Thus, a person would be either bad or good. As children grow up this perspective shifts. The
researcher was impressed that certain respondents noted the negative influence of sport stars. Furthermore, these influences did not disqualify these figures being considered role models for their talent. Thus, a mature perspective was exhibited by the respondents. The following sub-theme extends to other public figures assumed as role models.

3.3.5.2. SUB-THEME: MEDIA ROLE MODEL

A few of the female respondents identified Oprah as a role model in the media:

… Oprah, I don’t watch really the show, but, um, I’ve heard she makes lots of schools and she supports charities and that, that’s really nice. Ya, if I had the money to do that and I I was as rich as her… – 7

… Oprah… she’s a giver… she just built a school for girls even not hers. She still gave back…– 5

… Oprah she’s building that school in South Africa for those, that bunch of girls who like, like can’t afford to go to a proper school and now they are having like all these luxuries… – 1

The findings emphasize the benevolence of Oprah as a role model in impacting South African youth. However, what stood out most for the researcher was what was not said. The findings indicate a lack of awareness of mass media on their own lives. Considering that children ‘… spend as much time using media as they do in school, with family or friends’ (Wartella et al., 2000:6). The lack of general awareness of media effects was frightening to the researcher.

… its all like the biggest load of rubbish but… you can't get enough of it… – 1

… I wouldn’t say movies really influence me. – 3
But I don’t really look up to anyone… I have a favourite singer… I don’t particularly want to become a famous singer. – 2

But in celebrities like Paris Hilton, no! ah-ah! (responding to question on which celebrities she looks up to) – 7

Respondent 5 provided keen insight into the perceived lack of effect of the mass media when she referred to certain movies:

… you can enjoy it, yes of course, but it’s unrealistic so you can’t relate to it and you can’t like put yourself in their shoes. – 5

The relevance of modelled behaviour points to the selectivity of role models. The selectivity of role models is coloured by gender knowledge, children are sensitive to same-sex models whom they believe ‘… can provide personally relevant information’ (Durkin, 2005:143). However, ‘[n]early every media portrayal, scene, and storyline conveys a message about “normative” and expected behaviors of women and men’ (Ward, 2005:65).

Media is a microcosm of society. ‘[M]edia are important as a collective representation of what gender means and as a guide to what is valued within a society’ (Durkin, 2005:154). The researcher is of the opinion that media pervades and overwhelsms the social environment of the child. Societal prescriptions, norms and stereotypes are powerfully communicated but are often skewed and misrepresented. Ward (2005:69) stresses that ‘[w]ith their ability to amplify or neglect aspects of the social world, the American media are a potent socialization force.’

It is clear to the researcher that mass media is an undisputable source of observational learning. Vicarious reinforcement is the main method of learning. The child is bombarded with large amounts of stimuli. Although the child does not just passively absorb and incorporate social stimuli, the researcher argues that, when subjected to media, the child does passively sit. Much of the media effects are not even in the conscious mind, but remain in unconscious memory.
The researcher concludes from the findings that the lack of awareness of media effects stems from absence of dialogue. ‘Children don’t experience media in a vacuum… immediate family, such as parents and siblings, heavily influence what children take away from the viewing experience’ (Wartella et al., 2000:11). The researcher is of the opinion that very often, the parent is unaware of the myriad media stimuli the child is exposed to daily. Open dialogue encourages discussion and mediates the media effects on the child. Open dialogue fosters and welcomes a questioning mind, nurturing discriminating and selective role model choice.

3.3.5.3. SUB-THEME: NEGATIVE MEDIA EFFECTS

An interesting finding was seen in interview 5 regarding the powerful effects of mass media on children. The researcher was aware that the respondent was making a general comment and did not consider herself as influenced.

Well what I think is wrong, not only our, our TV programmes, but also overseas where they have, um, teenagers or something going to smoke, I know it’s part of the storyline but mostly teenagers are watching those soaps or programmes and stuff… And they don’t interpret it as they’re getting paid to do this, they’re not thinking about that when they’re watching. They’re just thinking about ‘Oh she’s doing it, so maybe I should give it a try!’… but they should do it um less frequently cos it’s as it is teenagers giving into those things. So they shouldn’t be like urging them to do it. – 5

The respondent made a valid point regarding the desirability and emulation of behaviour observed on TV. Distefan et al., (2004:1241) found that ‘… smoking by stars in movies significantly increases the risk of future smoking among adolescent girls who have never smoked, independent of effects arising from other tobacco advertising and promotional practices.’

… people look up to those people, so if they’re telling you to do those things, they’re going to pollute your lives. They’re going to mess up your
life for you just because of that one advert or that one flyer or something.
– 5

The researcher notes that smoking is but one example of the many dysfunctional behaviours modelled in the mass media. Unfortunately, as reflected in the findings above, the long-term detrimental effects are not shown. The researcher apposes the exposure to smoking with the violence seen in the media. Wartella *et al.* (2000:13) state that popular media presents ‘… a combustible formula in which violence has no context, causes no bad consequences and results in no remorse.’ The child or adolescent sees the movie star smoke and it looks glamorous, with no negative outcomes.

The researcher recalls the words of the same respondent quoted above regarding the unrealistic nature and irrelevance of certain movies. The respondent supported the notion that such media has no influence. However, the researcher is of the opinion, based on the present discussion, that such media has a great influence – an influence far greater than the respondent realizes. Media exposure, presenting fantasy and fact together, socializes the child both consciously and unconsciously. Desirable norms, values and behaviour are fed to the child through the vehicle of observational learning. Thus, although media is often unrealistic and seemingly irrelevant – it has an impact.

In summary, the above findings indicate the impact of media exposure on the respondents. Sports and media role models model both positive and negative behaviour, norms and values. Observational learning is the main vehicle in the dissemination of media. The findings suggest that there is a lack of awareness regarding the pervasive influence of mass media. The researcher stresses the need for dialogue in fostering conscious awareness of this influence. Conscious awareness promotes discretion and thought in role model choice.
3.4. Conclusion

The course of child development is not solitary but rather replete with many interactions with the environment. It was clear from the findings that both direct and indirect interactions impact the child. The study was interested in the significant interactions effecting the child in the middle childhood years.

It was clear that observation was an important method of socialization of the child. Such learning found the child observing, selecting and absorbing the desirable beliefs, values, norms and behaviours espoused by society. Thus, furthering his/her development into a functional adolescent and adult.

The interactions necessitated relationships, but not all relationships carry the same power of influence. A major finding of this study was the importance of parental figures in their validation, nurturance and furthering of the efficacy beliefs of the child.

Peer relationships were, as expected, seen as integral to the healthy growth of the child – in forming his/her belief about him/herself and the surrounding world. As much of the day is spent in the classroom, significant teachers from the past and present were viewed as the sculptors of future learning experiences.

Lastly, mass media, including sports figures, were underestimated in influence and pervasiveness. The summary and conclusions of the findings and consequent recommendations will be presented in the following chapter.
CHAPTER FOUR: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Introduction

The final chapter provides closure to the research process. Each chapter will be presented below with a summary, conclusions and recommendations. Thus, the overall research process will be outlined and the implications of the study detailed in the form of conclusions and recommendations. It is through this chapter that the researcher determines and communicates the success of the study in answering the research question of: What is the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in middle childhood?

4.2. CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

4.2.1. Summary

The topic of the research study was the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years. The opening chapter plotted the course that the study followed – the planning and procedures. One of the main focuses of this chapter was the research methodology that provided the framework for the study.

The researcher outlined the rationale for the study. The focus was on the middle childhood or school years, a critical developmental stage with a proliferation of socialization agents – role models. The researcher was interested in the effect that observational learning (modelling) had on the socialization of the child and more specifically on his/her developing self efficacy beliefs. The researcher identified the lack of relevant literature pertaining to children and relating to the South African context. The rapidly changing global environment and pervasive media exposure of modern living begged investigation regarding the effects on the child.
The social learning theory (Albert Bandura, 1963, 1986) was used as the **theoretical basis** of the study. Observational learning through direct tuition and vicarious reinforcement were the proposed modes of modelling.

The **goal** of the study (from which the research question was formed) was to explore the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years.

The following **objectives** served to achieve the goal of exploration:

- To describe ‘role models’ (according to social learning), ‘self efficacy’ and the ‘child in middle childhood’ in order to obtain a theoretical frame of reference in understanding the effect of role models on the self efficacy of children in middle childhood.

- To conduct a qualitative study to investigate the nature and effect of role models on children’s lives and especially on their self efficacy beliefs. To generate research findings that will be relevant to the modern South African context.

- To draw conclusions and make recommendations in order to promote awareness of role models on the self efficacy of children in middle childhood, amongst parents and professionals who work with children.

A qualitative **approach** was used in the study in gaining subjective, experiential rich data from the child’s perspective. A phenomenological **research strategy** was used as the researcher sought the meaning that the children attach to role models in their lived experience. **Applied research** characterized the research study. The researcher hoped to enhance the existing available data by adding insight in understanding the child’s subjective experiences. There was also a lack of information on this particular subject area, namely, the effect of role models on the child in middle childhood.

The unstructured interview was considered the best way of gaining understanding of the perceptions held by people (Tutty *et al.*, 1996:55). Thus, unstructured one-on-one
interviews were chosen as the method of data collection. The data was analysed according to the main themes and sub-themes evident in the data. The researcher integrated the literature from chapter 2 and her own interpretation when presenting the empirical results in chapter 3.

The pilot study was done through a simulation interview with a potential respondent who was not used in the actual sample. The researcher was able to test her own interviewing skills and ability to elicit relevant data. The setting, duration and effect on the respondent were all noted. The researcher also consulted with her supervisor at the University of Pretoria and teachers at the school from which the sample was taken. This assisted in the approach to the questioning, even though an interview schedule was not used, and the comprehension of the key concepts.

A purposive, non-probability sampling method was utilised with the aim to elicit relevant and rich data. The criteria for the sample were the following:

- All respondents must be aged between 11 and 13 years old.
- Respondents must have necessary verbal skills for participation in the interview.
- The sample must consist of respondents from across the academic spectrum.
- The inclusion of uncooperative children or children with serious behavioural problems should be avoided.

Ethical issues were taken into account and guided the preparation, implementation and termination of the study. The researcher was sensitive to the needs and rights of the child respondents and committed to protect the sample.

A written informed consent form was signed by the respondents and their parents. Participation was voluntary. The process of gaining insight and rich data heightened respondents’ awareness of their own lives and the presence or absence of adequate role models. This insight and awareness could have caused unintended distress. Thus, the respondents needed prior warning of this unintended result and assurance of confidentiality of both the school and the respondents’ identities.
Termination of the interview included a summary of the interview and the respondents’ reaction to the interview content. Further debriefing needed was to be referred to the school psychologist. A summary of the findings was also to be released to the school as a means of closure and feedback for the respondents and their parents.

The introductory chapter concluded with a summary of the key concepts, namely, child in middle childhood, role models, effect and self efficacy.

4.2.2. Conclusions

- Role models are the socialization agents influencing the acquisition and emulation of the norms, values and behaviours espoused by society.
- Subjective, experiential data was sought in the study relating to the meaning attached to role models and the effect they have on the child’s own self efficacy beliefs.
- The results were aimed at parents, teachers and helping professionals – socialization agents – in understanding their influence on the child’s developing efficacy beliefs.
- The power of observational learning, highlighted in the study, can raise the awareness of socialization agents and direct their approach to child education.
- The one-on-one unstructured interview was an effective data collection method. The researcher was able to achieve rapport with the sample children. The informal atmosphere was conducive for eliciting subjective data from the perspective of the child.
- The pilot study and consultation with experts helped the researcher/interviewer gain confidence in her ability and approach to interviewing.
- The purposive sampling method allowed the valuable input of the class teacher and school principal in selecting the most appropriate sample.
- The ethical issues guided the researcher in planning and implementing the study. The respondents were children and their needs and rights were respected and communicated to them.
The goal and objectives of the study were met. The researcher was able to gain rich, relevant and subjective data from the sample regarding the effect that role models have on their self efficacy beliefs.

4.3. CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE STUDY

4.3.1. Summary

Chapter two presented the theoretical context of the research study. The chapter was entitled ‘role models and self efficacy in the middle childhood’. The researcher began with defining the middle childhood years spanning ages 6 to 12. These are the school years and the concrete operational stage of cognitive development. The literature noted the shifting role of the parent as primary socialization agent since the social environment of the child extends to include peers and teachers.

The theory of social learning proposed by Bandura (1963, 1986) formed the basis of the study. This theory underscores observational learning – both direct tuition and vicarious reinforcement – as the powerful vehicle of socialization of a child. Thus, role models are agents of observational learning; modelling attitudes, values, norms, beliefs and behaviours for ensuing emulation. Self efficacy beliefs are a self evaluation of the individual’s capabilities. These beliefs fuel action since an individual will act and achieve success in accordance with this evaluation.

Individuals interpret information from four sources in the formation of self efficacy perceptions: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences (modelling), social persuasions, and physiological reactions (somatic and emotional states) (Pajares, 2005:344; Bandura, 1998).

Middle childhood sees peer relationships gaining in significance as children spend more time in peer company. Peers fulfil many functions for the child, for example: the need for companionship, acceptance, the acquisition of social skills (Owens, 2002:259). Social comparison is enabled in the school years.
Within the notion of peer influence, certain types can be identified, illuminating the power of peer association: reinforcement and reward, negative reinforcement, modelling, referent power and expert social power (Burton et al., 2003:237-239). The literature proposed that the nature of the peer relationship also determines the ensuing power of influence. Thus, best friends will have greater influence.

Eventhough the role of the parent changes in the middle childhood years, the parent wields great influence on the developing efficacy beliefs of the child. Social learning theory stresses that significant relationships and learning experiences do effect the child but do not merely shape him/her. Parents’ own efficacy beliefs, background, and parenting style colour the course of child development.

Parent praise and reaction provides the child with validation and a means for interpreting his/her success or failure. Effort-related praise fosters higher efficacy beliefs by allowing for self improvement. Ability-related praise fosters the view of intelligence as a stable trait and consequently, failure is debilitating indicating a deficit in intelligence (Mueller & Dweck, 1998:34).

The classroom, directed by the teacher, provides the ‘… social validation of cognitive abilities…’ (Bandura, 1997a:175). The positive regard and confidence that teachers place in students have great effect on student success and future learning experiences. Teacher efficacy beliefs project and impact on the students developing beliefs. Differential treatment of students based on gender bias and societal prescriptions was noted.

The effect of media and the sports arena was focused through the lens of gender socialization. The process of gender-linked knowledge acquisition and enactment was of interest to social learning theorists.

Sports participation and viewing was deemed significant for males as an accepted norm expressing their masculinity. The mass media was regarded as the vehicle of exposure to not only sports figures but a bombardment of social stimuli. Mass media conveys gender knowledge and that which is valued in society (Durkin, 2005:154). Social learning views the child as an active member of his/her social environment.
However, it was evident in the literature that media exposure taxes the child’s discrimination as discerning observer. Fantasy and fiction is depicted together, norms and values are often warped in the barrage of media stimuli.

Furthermore, the child does not experience mass media in a vacuum. The family environment provides the context, colouring the child’s interpretation of what he/she observes. The final factor mentioned in chapter two pertained to the selectivity of role models. Children were seen as more sensitive to a role model reflecting their self regulatory focus – which is the pursuit of success or the avoidance of failure.

The conclusions formulated from the literature and accompanying recommendations follow below.

4.3.2. **Conclusions**

- The school years of middle childhood present the child with a widening and influential social environment that impacts on his/her developing self concept, identity and self efficacy beliefs.
- It is not actual capabilities of the child but the belief in these capabilities that fuels and directs action.
- The notion of self-fulfilling prophesy is evident in efficacy beliefs. Children with high self efficacy beliefs view difficulty as a surmountable challenge rather than an inevitable defeat.
- Self efficacy beliefs are influenced and grown within the social environment of the child.
- More time is spent with and invested in peer relationships. Social comparison is enabled in the school years. This is in line with Erikson’s (1963, 1968) psychosocial stage of industry versus inferiority. There is an emphasis on skill attainment at school coupled with the impact and importance of peer relationships.
- Certain children are more susceptible to peer influence. Children of lower social status were sensitive to higher status children. The researcher interpreted this as the low efficacy beliefs accompanying low social status. Children with unfulfilling personal relationships are also more susceptible.
- Overt attachment to parents decreases in these years but the parent remains the nurturing caregiver and secure base for the child.
- The parents’ beliefs, behaviours and reactions colour the course of child development and the learning experiences of the child.
- Teachers underestimate the influence of their own efficacy beliefs, attitudes and self concept on student success and future learning experiences.
- Societal gender prescriptions are a factor in the differential treatment and evident male-bias in the classroom.
- Social learning theory emphasizes that gender role stereotypes and gender socialization is determined by the environment. Aside from the home, the mass media was seen as a key agent in gender role education.
- The sports arena is still replete with gender expectations. There is still a distinction between male and female sports.
- Mass media often models dysfunctional behaviour as desirable. Unfortunately, the long-term detrimental implications are rarely shown.
- The family environment which includes family values, norms and beliefs colours the child’s interpretation and absorption of mass media.

4.3.3. Recommendations

- Further research is needed to extend the subject of self efficacy and the child in the middle childhood.
- A lack of local literature was noted and the researcher recommends studies focusing on the South African context.
- The researcher was fascinated by the possible link between the efficacy level of the child and the choice of positive or negative role models and proposes this as a topic for further research.
- The importance of observation as the vehicle for learning was clearly seen. This awareness of the pervasive effects of social stimuli needs greater attention in the home and schools. The child needs to be aided in discerning, filtering and absorbing the barrage of social messages.
4.4. CHAPTER THREE: EMPIRICAL STUDY

4.4.1. Summary

This chapter briefly outlined the research methodology and detailed the actual findings of the research study. The sample consisted of 8 respondents, aged 11 to 13, consisting of 4 boys and 4 girls. The qualitative method of unstructured one-on-one interviews yielded rich data. The researcher presented the findings according to the themes and sub-themes evident to her in the process of data analysis.

The researcher was interested in the understanding of the respondents regarding the key concepts. The respondents identified a role model as a figure that they look up to, someone to be emulated. The motivational effect was evident as was the importance of role models in the process of social learning. The study highlighted the importance of academic efficacy beliefs above all other areas of functioning. The findings indicate high academic efficacy in the respondents.

The remaining themes explored the link between these key concepts, namely, the role models (the significant relationships) and the self efficacy beliefs of the child.

The first significant relationship was that of peers. Peers were seen as holding referent power of influence as figures to be emulated by the respondents. It was evident that peer relationships provide the forum for social comparison which is a vehicle of social learning. Peer feedback, acknowledgment and vicarious reinforcement provided by peer relationships coloured the efficacy beliefs of the respondents. A lack of awareness was identified regarding the often negative influence that peer affiliation presents. The researcher noted only positive perceptions regarding the social efficacy beliefs held by the respondents. These descriptions of self were mainly about skills and capabilities than about intrinsic characteristics.

As the middle childhood is marked by the onset of formal schooling, the role of the teacher was seen as significant. The characteristics of the teacher role model that stood out for the respondents were that of compassion and fair discipline. This impact was seen as integral for future learning and academic success. Thus, the teacher role
model enhanced the self efficacy beliefs of his/her students. An interesting assertion was made by one of the respondents (respondent 5) regarding the importance of all teachers in the continuum of child development. Each teacher propels the child to the next stage and adds to the integrated sum of all teacher-student interactions which frames the course of the learning for the child.

The findings highlighted the importance of the grade one teacher specifically in laying the foundation for further learning. Teacher efficacy at this stage was seen as crucial for optimal child development and the acquisition of fundamental academic skills. There were only a few mentions (by 3 respondents) regarding the negative impact of teachers. The common unfavourable characteristic was the lack of fair discipline.

A relationship that still holds great significance is the parent-child relationship. Parent reaction to the respondents’ achievement – their praise, motivation and validation – was a crucial factor impacting the efficacy beliefs of the respondents. The findings suggest that effort-related praise versus ability-related praise is more effective in enhancing the efficacy beliefs of the child. Negative encouragement was found impacting the efficacy beliefs of the respondents. The respondents attributed this to the parenting approach (respondent 3) and stemming from the parent’s unfortunate background (respondent 2).

The final theme evidenced the role of the mass media, including sports figures, on the efficacy beliefs of the respondents. This theme did not involve the direct interactions seen in the previous themes. The sports players playing a sport common to the respondents were influential, with observational learning as a mode of social influence. Gender identification was prominent in the findings as most of the respondents, identifying sports figures, were male.

The researcher noted that mass media exposure (sports included) relies on observation as the method of dissemination. A frightening finding was the lack of awareness of the effects of media exposure on the lives of the respondents. An interesting outlook was communicated by respondent 5 regarding media effect. She referred to the desirability and consequent emulation of dysfunctional behaviour seen on TV. The acknowledgement of the long-term detrimental effects was also expressed. The
researcher noted that although the respondent showed great insight, she did not consider herself as influenced. Thus, the lack of awareness of media effects was seen in most of the findings.

The results of the findings of the study allowed the researcher to arrive at the following conclusions. The recommendations of the researcher will also be included below.

4.4.2. Conclusions

- There was a shared understanding of role models as someone to look up to and emulate. The importance of identification with and similarity to the role model was recognized as important in both role model selection and the ensuing influence of the role model on the child.
- The emphasis on academics was seen as a quantifiable and tangible area of pursuit for the school child. The researcher attributed this to the school environment which places great importance on academic achievement.
- Peer relationships were considered of great importance by the respondents. The researcher suggested that peers, above all other role models, provide a realistic model for emulation. Social comparison aids the child in developing his/her distinctive self concept and self identity.
- The respondents were unaware of the pervasive and often negative effects of peer influence. These effects are complex and perhaps intangible for the child in middle childhood to grasp. The researcher furthered that the avoidance of any negative assertions may be owing to the child’s need for peer acceptance and connectedness.
- Social efficacy in the findings was seen as the perception of the child regarding his/her evaluation of him/herself in the eyes of his/her peers. It was thus, not the view or assessment of the child held by others but rather the child’s perception of this view that is seen to wield power over the child.
- The teacher role model was seen as distinctive in his/her compassion and fair discipline. The researcher interpreted these characteristics as evidence of the teacher’s high efficacy and the positive regard with which she viewed her
students. The teacher’s efficacy beliefs projected and inspired confidence in the students’ own capabilities.

- The findings highlight the importance of an efficacious teacher especially in the grade one year. The teacher, thus, plays a central role in the fledgling development of the self efficacy beliefs of the child at this sensitive stage of growth.

- A lack of fair discipline was seen as unfavourable in certain teachers. The researcher noted that the positive impact of teachers was overarching in the minds of the respondents since only a few respondents expressed teacher negativity.

- Parental attachment is still important in middle childhood, although the role of the parent has changed.

- Parent reactions, praise and motivation were seen as integral in framing the child’s evaluation of his/her own capability – his/her efficacy beliefs. Effort-related praise fosters the possibility for self improvement and higher efficacy. In contrast, ability-related praise fosters the rigid view of ability as a stable trait and failure as an intellectual deficit.

- Parents’ confidence in their child’s capability effects the child’s developing efficacy beliefs.

- Parental background colours their parenting approach. The researcher noted that unfulfilled personal expectations may be projected on the child to detrimental effect, often fostering an unhealthy dependence on the parent.

- The sports arena represents an area of stereotypical gender socialization of the child.

- Mass media is a microcosm of society. Societal prescriptions, norms and stereotypes are powerfully communicated but are often skewed and misrepresented.

- The mass media bombards the social world of the child with indiscriminate stimuli. The lack of awareness of media effects led the researcher to conclude that although the child is an active, thinking observer – mass media dulls these abilities and much of the effects are covert.
4.4.3. Recommendations

The following recommendations are directed at teachers, parents and helping professionals:

- Academics need to be de-emphasized to some degree to discourage children from defining their worth and capability solely in terms of academic achievement.
- Effort-related praise is more effective and favourable for efficacy enhancement than ability-related praise. This should be emphasized in all areas of functioning of the child (for example: academics, sports, recreation, acts of kindness)
- Teacher efficacy needs to be enhanced and nurtured. Teachers underestimate the impact they have on the future learning experiences of the child. A mentorship programme and continuing teacher education can be beneficial in this regard.
- The lack of awareness of media effects is cause for alarm. The researcher concludes that this stems from a lack of dialogue. Children do not experience social and media stimuli in a vacuum. Open dialogue is needed in schools and at home to mediate the effects and bring these effects into the conscious mind of the child. Open dialogue fosters and welcomes a questioning mind, nurturing discriminating and selective role model choice.

The following recommendations are suggested as areas for further research:

- A similar research study is needed within the many different communities in South Africa, spanning the social strata.
- A general study to discover the role models of South African children in the middle childhood will be valuable as a basis for further research on self efficacy beliefs.
- Further research pertaining children and self efficacy beliefs is necessary, with emphasis on reactions and resilience to failure ‘… because self-efficacy is not so much about learning how to succeed as it is about learning how to persevere when one does not succeed’ (Pajares, 2005:345).
A study exploring the relationship between media exposure and self efficacy beliefs will be useful in raising awareness of media effects.

4.5. Evaluation of the Research Question

The research question for this study was: What is the effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in middle childhood?

The researcher believes that the study successfully showed the effects that role models, socialization agents, have on the developing self efficacy beliefs of the child in the middle childhood years. Both the literature and the empirical study provided ample data in presenting these effects.

4.6. Concluding Summary

The effects of role models in the lives of the respondents were seen in terms of observational learning. This included direct tuition, vicarious reinforcement and enactive experience. The period of middle childhood is a time of change in the life of the growing child. The process of socialization becomes more complex as their social world expands to include the school environment – teachers and peers. Yet, the parent-child relationship is still significant for the child.

Role models are selected, observed, evaluated and integrated by the child as an active member of his/her social world. The study highlighted that not all role models have the same significance for the child, hold the same influence. Moreover, observational learning is both direct and indirect, including negative and positive models.

Self efficacy beliefs govern the achievement and success of the child. These beliefs are a learned self evaluation. The study emphasised that ‘... it is not simply a matter of how capable you are; it is also a matter of how capable you believe you are’ (Pajares, 2005:243). In conclusion, role models were seen as key figures in the developing efficacy beliefs of the child. But, they do not solely determine the child’s beliefs – rather serving as a factor in the powerful self evaluation that is self efficacy.
LIST OF REFERENCES


Accessed on 2007/03/26


1. TITLE OF STUDY:
The effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:
The purpose of this study is to explore the nature of the role models held by children in middle childhood and the effect that the role models have on the children’s self efficacy/self evaluation.

3. PROCEDURES:
My/our child will be part of an unstructured interview which is a forum for discussion. The researcher will assume the role of interviewer. My/our child will be asked for his or her opinion and feelings relating to the purpose of the study.

4. POSSIBLE DISCOMFORT:
I/we understand the possibility of negative feelings or sensitive issues being evoked within the interview setting, which may cause some discomfort. I trust that the researcher, as a qualified social worker and counsellor, will do her best to minimize such discomfort.

5. BENEFITS OF THE STUDY:
I/we understand that there may not be any immediate benefits for my/our child participating in this study. It may, however, lead me/us to a greater understanding of my/our child in the way he/she thinks about himself (efficacy beliefs) and his/her environment (role models). The results of the study may assist professionals and parents in understanding the perceptions of children.
and the effect of these perceptions on children’s goal setting and goal attainment.

6. RIGHTS OF THE PARTICIPANT:
I/we have the right to withdraw my/our child from the study at any time. I/we understand that there will be no negative consequences for such withdrawal.

7. FINANCIAL COMPENSATION
I/we are aware that there is no financial compensation for participation in this study.

8. CONFIDENTIALITY
In order to record exactly what is said during the interview session a voice recorder will be used. The recording will only be listened to by the researcher. I/we understand that all names, details and other information will be known only to the researcher and will be kept confidential. My/our child's name will not appear in the mini-dissertation or in any other publication. The research data will be stored in a safe place for a period of 15 years for archiving purposes.

9. If I/we have any questions or concerns I/we can contact Keren Wedcliffe on 082-2-111-222 at any time.

I understand my/our rights as the parent/s of a research participant and I voluntarily consent to my/our child’s participation in this study. I understand what the study is and why and how it is being done.

______________________    ___________________
Parent/Guardian’s signature     Date

______________________    ___________________
Researcher's signature     Supervisor’s signature
PARTICIPANT’S INFORMED ASSENT

1. TITLE OF STUDY:
The effect of role models on the self efficacy of the child in the middle childhood years.

2. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:
The purpose of this study is to find out about the role models that primary school children have and how role models effect what children think they, themselves, can achieve.

3. PROCEDURES:
I will be interviewed by Keren. The interview will be an informal discussion to help Keren understand my thoughts and feelings.

4. POSSIBLE DISCOMFORT:
I understand that talking about some things may make me a bit uncomfortable. But I know that Keren will do her best to help me feel comfortable.

5. BENEFITS OF THE STUDY:
I understand that I might find out new things about myself when I talk about my role models and what I think I can achieve. I know that by helping Keren with this study, I am helping people understand what children think about themselves.

6. RIGHTS OF THE PARTICIPANT:
I have the right to tell Keren if I don’t want to carry on with the interview.
7. **FINANCIAL COMPENSATION**
I will not get any money from helping Keren with this study.

8. **CONFIDENTIALITY**
I understand that my name, details and other information will be kept private. Keren is the only one who knows my name. When she writes about me she will use another name.

9. If I have any questions I can ask Keren, or I can ask my parents to phone her.

I understand my rights as a research participant and I would like to help with this study. I understand what the study is about and why and how it is being done.

______________________    ___________________
Participant’s signature      Date

______________________             __________________
Researcher’s signature      Supervisor’s signature