

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION, STATEMENT OF PROBLEM AND GOAL OF STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

As South Africa moves forward into the 21st century, the long-term vision is for all South Africans to seek a society in which sound welfare, health, education and other services are available to all and that these aims will be realised in a competitive, rapidly growing economy (GEAR, 1996:1).

Social work has a responsibility to respond to the context in which it is practised. The transitional political process in South Africa, along with changing economic, social and environmental realities, has compelled social work educators and practitioners to develop skills, strategies and techniques to respond to the many challenges facing the profession (Ramphal & Moonilall, 1993). It is the researcher's opinion that social workers need to contribute to the process of reconstruction and development by engaging in processes to develop increasing personal and interpersonal power so that individuals or collectives (groups) can improve their life situation. In fact, all professions need to contribute to the process of reconstruction and development in South Africa. The care and development of children should be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of strategies to develop human resources. The Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP)(1994) rightly calls for empowerment and capacity building at all levels, including schools.

Social work services should be directed at releasing people's potential for growth and adaptive functioning, and increasing the responsiveness of environments to people's capacities, aspirations and needs (Germain, 1982:20). Social Work has as policy the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) outlining the principles, guidelines, recommendations and programmes for developmental social welfare in South Africa. In the White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:7), all citizens *"are called upon to participate in the development of an equitable, people-centred, democratic and appropriate social welfare system. The goal of*

developmental social welfare is a humane, peaceful, just and caring society which will uphold welfare rights, facilitate the meeting of basic human needs, release people's creative energies, help them achieve their aspirations, build human capacity and self-reliance, and participate fully in all spheres of social, economic and political life." Consequently, the focus of social work practice should be on giving positive, ample support to developmental and preventive approaches.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997) has a new policy approach based on social development. Lombard (1996:163) states that strategies for implementing social development link the residual-institutional models of welfare to a developmental model. This approach is generally regarded as a paradigm shift from the existing approaches. This new paradigm incorporates the following vision and mission into social welfare:

- Vision: *"A welfare system which facilitates the development of human capacity and self-reliance within a caring and enabling socio-economic environment."*
- Mission: *"To serve and build a self-reliant nation in partnership with all stakeholders through an integrated social welfare system which maximizes its existing potential, and which is equitable sustainable, accessible, people-centred and developmental"* (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:15).

The developmental approach appealed to the researcher, who was formerly a social worker and now practises as a psychologist and educator, because of the long-accepted need for interventions that promote social welfare in proactive and positive ways.

The above-mentioned statements indicate that welfare cannot function effectively in isolation from other sectors influencing the well-being of the nation, for example education, health and housing. One of the national goals of the developmental social welfare strategy is: *"To promote social development intrasectorally both within the welfare departments and in collaboration with other Government departments and non-governmental stakeholders"* (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:15).

Social development is a process of planned social change designed to promote people's welfare in conjunction with a dynamic process of economic development (Midgley, 1995:25). The ultimate objective of social development is to bring about sustained improvement in the

well-being of the individual, family, community and society at large. The reduction or eradication of mass poverty, inequality and conditions of underdevelopment is a widely accepted indicator of social progress. The dimensions of social development are social welfare; health; education; housing; urban and rural development; and land reform (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:96). Lombard (1996:163) advocates a social developmental approach which includes helping individuals, groups and communities, but in a different way, namely by developing human resources (including capacity building and empowerment) and, where possible, by facilitating and enhancing economic development.

1.2 MOTIVATION FOR THE CHOICE OF THE STUDY

Society pays a high price when children and young people lack social and emotional competence. Social competence refers to the ability to establish acceptable and productive relationships with other people. It has been linked with many areas of success in adulthood, such as vocational competence, active involvement and participation in community development, marital satisfaction and parenting socially adjusted children. A strong and growing body of research also links intrapersonal and interpersonal functioning in childhood and adolescence to a wide variety of life outcomes, including academic functioning, social functioning, school dropout, teen pregnancy, juvenile delinquency and mental health problems (Bruene-Butler, Hampson, Elias, Clabby & Schuyler, 1997:239-240).

It is of particular relevance for the social work profession to focus on personal and interpersonal life skills as these are the most fundamental building blocks influencing the child's and youth's total functioning and behaviour (Briggs, 1995:280). The following statement is therefore appropriate: *"The Department of Welfare will negotiate with the Department of Education about the implementation of social support and development services including life skills training programmes which could be run throughout the school-going years and could be incorporate into the curriculum. This training should include personal relationship skills, education regarding sexuality and substance abuse, and other appropriate programmes. It should be aimed at teaching interpersonal skills, the development of the self-esteem, and decision-making and problem-solving skills"* (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997: 62).

This collaboration between the Departments of Social Welfare and Education could support the attainment of the following vision for South Africa, as stated in the document for Lifelong Learning through a National Curriculum Framework (1997): "*A prosperous, truly united, democratic and internationally competitive country with literate, creative and critical citizens leading productive, self-fulfilled lives in a country free of violence, discrimination and prejudice*" (Department of Education, 1997:1). Since it is recognised that partnerships between different ministries will be important for the purposes of co-operation and cost-sharing (ANC, 1994:35), the concerns of education support services in Education should be brought together with those of Health and Welfare under the national Reconstruction and Development Programme. This would facilitate sufficient resourcing for the massive health and welfare task facing education support services (Lazarus & Donald, 1995:48-49). According to Kotzé (1994:35), the mere provision of education is not enough to achieve specific educational objectives. Education should be supplemented by support services such as school social work, school guidance and counselling, specialised education, school health and school psychology. The researcher has always had a special interest in school social work and the fact that it is acknowledged as one of the essential education support services that should develop and promote the social work profession and needs further investigation.

The debate on education in South Africa has gone through various phases in recent years. Lately it has shifted to acknowledge the importance of education support services as an integral component of the curriculum. It is realised that school social work, school guidance and counselling, specialised education, school health and school psychology services constitute important elements of education. Based on these assumptions, the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI, 1992) emphasised the necessity of support services in education. The NEPI principles state that an integrated approach should be followed in which the promotive or developmental aspects of support services should be an integral part of the general curriculum (Kotzé, 1994:36). However, although there may be overlapping between some of these support services, each of them should also perform a particular function in education.

Primary prevention seeks to prevent problematic stress and maladaptation and to promote adaptive functioning and positive development. Life skills education and training are part of a developmental approach and therefore also a form of primary prevention. Central to the life

skills philosophy is the concept of self-empowerment and a belief that skills can be learned, modified and improved as the person develops and adjusts to life's challenges (Hopson & Scally, 1986). There is also a conviction that all children and the youth need to be prepared for life at all levels – physically, emotionally, spiritually, intellectually and socially – if South Africa is to have a self-reliant rainbow nation, maximise its existing potential and contribute to a caring and developmental society. The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:61) states: *"Social welfare personnel should foster self-reliance and promote the personal growth and social competence of families and children through capacity-building and empowerment programmes."*

Current demands in South Africa for rapid and significant change require productive and efficient welfare programmes. Careful programme development and evaluation are essential for effective ongoing planning to ensure that programmes meet the challenge to build new capacities for growth and development for all South Africans, especially children.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Approaches to primary prevention seek to reduce the sources of stress in individuals and in their social and physical environments, while simultaneously building the services to growth-promoting experiences (compare Hoffmann, 1990). If social workers could use professional knowledge and skills to develop people's potential and prevent problems from arising, then many individuals would be spared destructive experiences (compare Thackeray, Farley & Skidmore, 1994). A greater understanding of human behaviour, interrelationships and social phenomena is called for to anticipate problems before they occur.

The need for developmental programmes aimed at primary prevention in the school setting has important implications for the practice of school social work. In emphasising the important developmental and preventive roles that social workers can play in schools, Sancho (1994) asserts that the ultimate objective of school social work is prevention. The potential of school social work and the school context should be recognised in endeavours to promote skills for living among communities in South Africa. The fact that school social work is recognised as one of the education support services is very important for the profession. Livingstone (1990)

stresses the need to view schools in the wider context of the society in which they operate. Livingstone (1990) highlights the mutual goals of school social work and education. Both are deeply concerned with the maximum development of children. Both stress that the growth of each individual should be fostered so as to fulfil his/her potential. Both are concerned with the physical and emotional education and social conditions of the child. Social workers and educators (teachers) should therefore mobilise their efforts to help children attain their goals.

Life skills education and training programmes, which offer skills to help people cope with everyday life, have in recent years become a highly popular method of intervention and prevention in social work. It is a proactive method and supports the developmental approach of social welfare. Unfortunately, the researcher believes that the popularity of the method has not been linked to careful programme development and evaluation, in order to assess whether the stated objectives or outcomes of the specific life skills programmes have actually been achieved. The Consultative Paper No 1 on Special Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 1999:61) states that learning programmes and materials for life skills education should be developed by appropriately trained personnel.

A multidisciplinary and intersectoral approach should be taken to ensure a holistic, integrated and comprehensive approach which involves education support personnel. This requires an interdisciplinary approach involving social work, education and other support services. Teamwork and professional co-operation among the different professions are essential for success. The literature emphasises that the social worker should be familiarised with the school as a social institution where the central concerns are teaching and learning (Kotzé, 1994:38).

Kotzé (1994:38) states that the school social worker might be faced with professional biases from the teaching profession and scepticism from the authorities, and adds: *"This problem could be addressed by creating an educational orientation and environment that will not only accept new members into the educational team, but that would emphasise the importance of support services in the school. This will require an integrated and interdisciplinary approach. This approach has the potential to address many of the problems that schools experience currently and which may become worse in the near future"* (Kotzé, 1994:49).

Life skills education has been formally included in all school curricula since 1996, but real efforts have to be made to make life skills education more accessible. Life skills programmes should be designed to promote the vision of Curriculum 2005 and to enable the facilitators (social workers) to implement an outcomes-based educational approach. The social worker can be an initiator of life skills education and his/her work may become the model on which further life skills education is based. This is important not only for South Africa, but also for the rest of the world. There is a universal interest in and need for life skills education (Rooth, 1997:2). As school social work is part of the proposed model of education support services, as set out in Lazarus and Donald (1995), it has been regarded as an essential support service to education.

Rooth (1997:28) believes that the importance of life skills education in the primary school cannot be stressed enough. Life skills education in the primary school is developmental, promotive and preventive. Children who have access to life skills education will learn the skills they need to cope with the problems of growing up. It is difficult to begin life skills education at secondary school if the important groundwork has not been done at primary school. Life skills development is a lifelong process.

Primary school children, or rather children in the General Education and Training Band (pre-school; foundation phase; intermediate and senior phase), can become more self-empowered by learning life skills. Social workers, teachers, psychologists and parents could be modelling growth-oriented values, and helping children become more aware of their inner and external worth, by giving them information and by helping them to develop goals and commitments. They could also work at changing the schools and other institutions into empowering rather than depowering places to live and work (compare Hopson & Scally, 1986:79).

The focus on the development, implementation and evaluation of a personal and interpersonal life skills programme for children in primary schools (Grade 7 of the senior phase) should promote the principle of caring for one another's well-being and should foster a spirit of mutual support.

The following were concerns for the researcher and call for investigation:

- There are no guidelines for the social worker to develop/design life skills programmes for senior phase learners, although this would promote the vision of Curriculum 2005.
- There are no guidelines for the social worker to implement or present a life skills programme for the senior phase learners, based on an outcomes-based educational approach.
- Social workers present various life skills programmes at different primary and secondary schools without evaluating or assessing the effectiveness of the programmes.

The main problem investigated in this study was formulated in the following question:

How should a personal and interpersonal life skills programme be developed, implemented and evaluated to have an effect on the personal growth and social functioning of learners in the senior phase of the General Education and Training Band?

1.4 GOAL AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main goal of the study was to develop and implement a personal and interpersonal life skills programme for Grade 7 learners in the senior phase of a traditionally African school, and to evaluate whether participation in the life skills programme would lead to personal growth (self-empowerment) and social competence and thus contribute to the optimal social functioning of children in the classroom, school, family and community (capacity building).

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- To do a literature study so as to review the content of the existing life skills programmes in different disciplines. These programmes are being developed and implemented at national and international levels.
- To do a literature study on the adolescent which reflect the learner in the senior phase of the General Education and Training Band.
- To formulate and administer a questionnaire to help learners to assess (rate) their personal and interpersonal life skills before and after the programme.

- To devise appropriate modules as subsets of the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme for learners attending a primary school (a traditionally black school).
- To implement the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme by making use of facilitation, group work, experiential learning and continuity.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of the Life Skills Programme by determining whether it
 - contributed to the learner's self-knowledge, knowledge of feelings, thinking, actions, needs, responsibilities, feelings of self-worth, positive attitudes towards the self (enhancement of self-concept and self-reliance: personal).
 - contributed to the learner's knowledge and understanding of his/her family, school, friends, community; developed more effective communication, problem-solving and conflict management skills (empowerment, capacity-building) and in addition had an impact on the learner's participation in the classroom, school and community (interpersonal).
- To determine the strengths and weaknesses of the programme with a view to making recommendations on improving it. To this end, a questionnaire was formulated and administered to evaluate the Life Skills Programme.
- To provide guidelines for social workers on developing, implementing and evaluating life skills programmes for children and the youth.

1.5 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS FOR THE STUDY

Hypotheses are tentative, concrete and testable statements about relations among variables. A hypothesis which is suggested as an answer to a problem, has to be tested empirically before it can be accepted and incorporated into a theory (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:37).

In view of the preceding statement of the problem, this research is directed further by the following overarching hypothesis:

The Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme has a statistically significant influence on the personal and interpersonal development of the Grade 7 learners in the senior phase of the General Education and Training Band.

Through a personal and interpersonal life skills programme, children's self-reliance can be fostered and personal growth and social competence promoted. The Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme is therefore a capacity-building and self-empowerment programme.

The following questions guided the study:

- How have existing personal and interpersonal life skills programmes been developed?
- Were the minimum standards for the outcomes of the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme being achieved?
- How much did the participants (learners in Grade 7) change during their participation in the Life Skills Programme?
- Was the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme effective in equipping children with personal and interpersonal skills and would it be appropriate for children (learners) from disadvantaged areas?
- How could the Life Skills Programme be further developed/adapted to increase its effectiveness?

1.6 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The ecological perspective is closely linked to the primary prevention perspective, as both these approaches focus on people and their interaction with the environment. The ecological perspective, developmental approach (intervention) and primary prevention focus on creating opportunities for positive social participation and skills to develop and promote successful relationships (compare Astor, 1995; Fraser, 1996). The researcher believes that interventions should be developmental and not focused on problems.

The ecological perspective was viewed as an appropriate framework within which to contextualise this study. This approach emphasises the multiple contextual influences on human behaviour and the concept of reciprocity between the individual and the environment (Lombard, 1992:14-15). Applying the ecological perspective therefore ensures that a situation cannot be viewed in a fragmented way but instead is seen as a whole with which the social worker has to deal. The ecosystem theory provides enough scope, not only to take into

account the various levels on which people function, but also to make provision for these by means of an integrated approach to service. The latter implies the existence of a free flow between people's levels of functioning with the purpose of helping individuals, groups and communities to improve and maintain their social functioning (Lombard, 1992:18-19). McKendrick (1990) views the person-in-transaction-with-the-environment stance as being the most useful and relevant approach for the South African social worker. One of the distinguishing features of social work is its focus on the "wholeness" and the totality of the person-in-situation gestalt (Thackeray, et al., 1994). The holistic, dynamic view of the reciprocal exchanges between people and environments moves away from simplistic, linear cause-and-effect explanations (McKendrick, 1990). The primary value of the ecological system is, therefore, that it helps social workers to focus on the totality of man and his/her environment, irrespective of whether they are using casework, group or community work (Lombard, 1992:19).

Whittaker, Schinke & Gilchrist (1986:482-483) view the environment as a set of "*nested concentric structures*", each influencing the other and ultimately the developing child. These structures may be viewed as contexts or systems that do not function in isolation. In the ecological model, interventions may be targeted at micro, meso, exo and/or macrosystemic levels, depending on where the deficits are experienced. Therefore, if deficits occur at a microsystemic level, intervention will accordingly aim at the school, family or child. Intervention at the mesosystemic level will focus on strengthening the partnerships between the school and the family. Exosystemic interventions will target neighbours, social agencies, businesses and the community at large. Macrosystemic interventions will focus on identifying dysfunctional policies and work at the broader level of national values, legislation and policies (Kasiram, 1995:65-66).

Therefore the ecological perspective accommodates a broad spectrum of problems or needs and provides a suitable framework for understanding the concepts of personal (self-concept/self-confidence) and interpersonal (relationships with friends, family members, community members) and the reciprocal processes between people and their environment. Kasiram (1995: 66-68) regards the school as a real-life ecological unit which is an obvious venue for the practice of an ecological approach to building partnerships among subsystems, with the aim of the joint prevention and solving of problems.

The researcher support the view of Whittaker, et al., (1986) who outline the value of this paradigm in designing service programmes for children, youth and families, namely by –

- building supportive, nurturing environments for people through various forms of environmental helping which are designed to increase social support;
- improving competence in dealing with proximate and distal environments through the teaching of specific life skills, such as social skills for adolescents, family living skills and conflict resolution skills.

This all-encompassing focus of the ecological perspective increases the likelihood that social work programmes in schools will be valued as essential support services.

1.7 RESEARCH APPROACH

De Vos, Schurink and Strydom (1998:15) states that the direction of the research process and the research methodology are determined by the researcher's choice between a quantitative or qualitative, or combined quantitative-qualitative approach. For Mouton and Marais (1990:155-156) the quantitative approach is a more highly formalised as well as a more explicitly controlled approach to research in the social sciences, in other words, with a more precisely defined range which, in terms of the methods used, is relatively close to the physical sciences.

The present study employed combinations of the quantitative and qualitative approaches. De Vos (1998:359) asserts that the concept of "triangulation" is sometimes used to designate a conscious combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology. Grinnell (1997:523) states that triangulation is a common method to establish the trustworthiness of qualitative data. Triangulation was used in this study, mainly to make use of multiple methods of data collection with a view to increasing the reliability of observations.

Unfortunately, due to constraints of space and the limitations on a mini master's dissertation, only the quantitative approach and data collection method can be reported here. However, this dissertation will be followed up by further research reports and articles in scientific journals.

1.8 TYPE OF RESEARCH

The current study employed intervention research. The researcher used one of five related traditions that are particularly useful in conducting intervention research, namely experimental social innovation. The paradigm of experimental social innovation uses quasi-experimental designs to evaluate the effects of treatment programmes and other innovations designed to address social problems (Rothman & Thomas, 1994:25-26).

According to De Vos (1998:365), intervention research is attempted when something new is created and then evaluated. She states: "*...it is a new technology or intervention, an innovation, while programme evaluation as 'mere' programme evaluation assumes the prior existence of a programme or intervention designed and developed by someone else, perhaps long before the evaluator ever entered the field*" (De Vos, 1998:365). In the current study the researcher designed and developed, implemented and eventually evaluated the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme (new intervention), for African (black) primary school children (Grade 7) in a disadvantaged milieu. The following phases and selected activities of intervention design and development (D&D) were used:

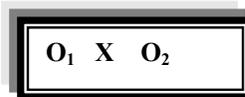
1. Problem analysis and project planning
2. Information gathering and synthesis
3. Design
4. Early development and pilot testing
5. Evaluation and advanced development
6. Dissemination (De Vos, 1998:385; Rothman & Thomas, 1994:10-11;28).

This study was targeted at addressing the application of research in practice. This is in keeping with Grinnell (1988:66) who states that the majority of social work research is applied, in other words, it addresses immediate concerns, developmental aspects or problems facing the professional in practice, and interventions should be made.

1.9 RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive design with a quasi-experiment, the one-group pre-test-post-test experiment, was used in this study. The quasi-experimental design is characterised by a single sample of participants who are exposed to some or other treatment or experimental intervention (to which they would not have been subjected in the normal course of events) (Huysamen, 1994:51). The one-group pre-test-post-test design is also referred to as a before-and-after design because it includes a pre-test of the dependent variable, which can be used as a basis of comparison with the post-test results. The researcher therefore used what Grinnell and Williams (1990:160) refer to as a descriptive pre-test and post-test design.

The research design can be represented as follows:



Where:

O_1 = First measurement of the dependent variable

X = Independent variable, the intervention (Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme)

O_2 = Second measurement of the dependent variable
(Grinnell, 1997:288-289).

The one-group pre-test design, in which the pre-test (questionnaire for learners to rate from 0 to 3 their personal and interpersonal life skills) preceded the introduction of the independent variable (Life Skills Programme). A post-test (questionnaire for learners to rate from 0 to 3 their personal and interpersonal life skills) followed it and could be used to determine precisely how the independent variable affected the Grade 7 learners in a primary school. The Wilcoxon test for symmetry or the signed rank test was used to test the statistical significance of the Life Skills Programme (Steyn, Smit, Du Toit & Strasheim, 1994:15).

To extend the evaluation of the effectiveness of the Life Skills Programme (contents and media used), a questionnaire was compiled by the researcher and completed by the

participants (Grade 7 learners/ senior phase learners). A frequency analysis and distributions were done on the data. The design for the present study is presented diagrammatically below:

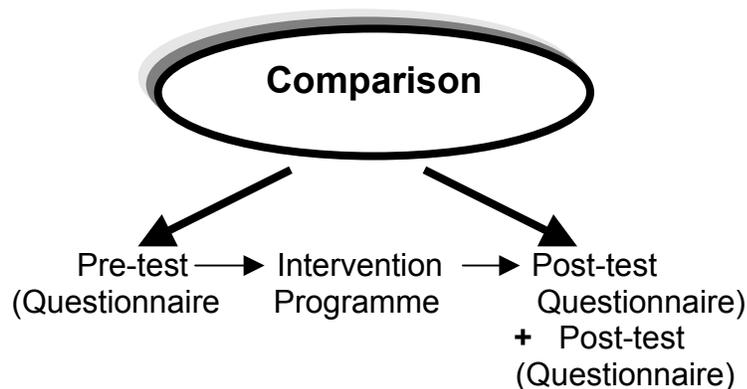


FIGURE 1.1 RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE STUDY

The pre-test (questionnaire where learners had to rate their personal and interpersonal life skills on an ordinal scale of 0 to 3) was administered. The Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme was implemented. The post-test (questionnaire where learners had to rate their personal and interpersonal life skills on an ordinal scale of 0 to 3) was administered. Lastly, a questionnaire on the evaluation of the programme (usefulness; importance of different modules for participants; methods used; usefulness for personal and interpersonal growth and social competence; most important life skills learnt) was administered.

1.10 PILOT STUDY

1.10.1 Literature study

A literature study was conducted on approaches to life skills, national and international life skills programmes for children and the youth, the components of life skills education and its facilitation, and the developmental characteristics, developmental tasks and needs in late childhood and early adolescence from a multicultural perspective.

1.10.2 Consultation with experts

The following experts on the subject were consulted:

- Ms Edna Rooth, Director of the Life Skills Education Project at the University of Cape Town – expert on life skills education and training. The purpose was to get her ideas on developing life skills programmes for learners in the senior phase.
- Mrs Sara S. Lekgethla, Principal of the Primary School, Mamelodi East, where the research project was undertaken as she knows the history and traditions of the school very well.
- Dr Hermie Boraine, Department of Statistics, University of Pretoria – expert on statistics, who was consulted on the statistical methods used.
- Dr Mike J. van der Linde, Computer Networking and User Support Services, University of Pretoria – expert on computer networking and user support services, who was consulted on the graphics and charts used to represent the statistics.

1.10.3 Feasibility of the study and ethical aspects

The study was undertaken with minimal financial implications because the Faculties of Education and Humanities at the University of Pretoria, where the researcher is employed, are involved in several community service projects at primary and secondary schools in Mamelodi, a township near Pretoria.

The researcher obtained informed written consent from the Department of Education, the principal of the school, the school governing board, teachers and parents of participants involved regarding all possible information on the goal of the study, the procedures followed during the study, the possible advantages and disadvantages of the study and the credibility of the researcher. The researcher did all in her power to ensure that the participants in the study were protected from physical or emotional harm, discomfort, or danger that might arise due to research procedures. All participants were assured that any data collected from or about them will be held in confidence. All participants in the study had the right to withdraw from the study or to request that data collected about them not be used. Participants and their parents had the knowledge and gave written consent that photos may be taken at the beginning of the implementation of the Life Skills Programme, during the HIV/AIDS awareness day and at the termination of the programme.

1.10.4 Pilot study of questionnaires and programme

Rothman and Thomas (1994:36) state that during the early development and pilot testing phase, a primitive design is evolved into a form that can be evaluated under field conditions. This phase includes the important operations of developing a preliminary intervention, conducting a pilot test and applying design criteria to the preliminary intervention concept. Rothman and Thomas (1994:36) add that pilot tests are designed to determine whether the intervention will work.

In the current study, a pilot study was conducted by designing and applying a personal and interpersonal life skills programme to a group of eight African Grade 7 learners. These Grade 7 learners were not part of the sample for the main study. The pre-test (questionnaire) and post-test (questionnaire) were designed and administered. The learners (children) and teachers were interviewed. Where shortcomings were found in the programme and questionnaires, they were adapted or redesigned.

1.11 DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH POPULATION, SAMPLING METHOD AND LIMITATIONS

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:85) state that the entire group of people who are the object of research and about whom the researcher wants to determine some characteristics, is called the population. In this study the population is all the Grade 7 learners in primary schools or children in the senior phase of the General Education and Training Band (GET) in South Africa.

In the present study a non-probability sample was used, namely an accidental or availability sample. According to Huysamen (1994:44), an accidental sample is the most convenient collection of subjects who are available for research purposes. The limitation of the non-probability sample is that it makes generalisation of the research results risky (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:95).

The sample under study was all the Grade 7 (learners) at a Primary School in Mamelodi East. It is a traditionally black primary school and the learners' mother tongue is mainly Tsonga. Owing to the pressing need for life skills education, the principal and teachers of the Primary School requested that all the Grade 7 learners (learners) should be included in the programme. The staff of the school did not approve of the idea of random sampling or having a comparison group (the experimental group and control group). This would also be against the key principles guiding curriculum development for Curriculum 2005. There were 40 learners in the only Grade 7 class and their ages varied from approximately 12 to 16 years.

The sample size (n=40) limits its representativeness of the population from which it was drawn (Marlow, 1993). This factor further limits the generalizability of the study. This was not a major concern as the evaluation was undertaken with a view to developing and improving programme effectiveness within a particular context. It must be noted that the sample was selected in order to obtain in-depth information. This was adequately achieved in this study.

The study did not include a control group against which to judge programme outcomes. However, as pointed out by Fitz-Gibbon and Morris (1987), the lack of a control group where programme implementation is being monitored, is not a serious problem. Furthermore, the use of the triangulation method which encompassed multiple methods of data gathering and analysis minimized this problem. Cross checks between data gathered using different instruments enabled the researcher to validate the information obtained

1.12 DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

This section contains definitions of the essential concepts used in this study.

1.12.1 Senior phase and senior phase learners

Curriculum 2005 is a new education curriculum driving the process of education transformation in South Africa. Curriculum 2005 is an outcomes-based curriculum with a special emphasis on integration of the eight learning areas, namely Arts and Culture;

Economic and Management Sciences; Human and Social Sciences; Language, Literacy and Communication; Life Orientation; Mathematics, Mathematical Literacy and Mathematical Sciences; Natural Sciences and Technology. Besides changes in education, Curriculum 2005 has also resulted in structural and organisational changes. These changes are partly due to the fact that all Education and Training, and hence Curriculum 2005, form part of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The NQF is a mechanism for integrating Education and Training (Department of Education, 1997) and is mandated by the South African Qualifications Act (RSA, Act no. 85 of 1995).

The whole spectrum of Education and Training (i.e. not merely schools) is divided into three bands:

- The General Education and Training Band (GET): Grades 1 - 9
- The Further Education and Training Band (FET): Grades 10 - 12
- The Higher Education and Training Band (HET)

The General Education and Training Band (GET) comprises the following:

- Foundation phase (Grades 1, 2 and 3)
- Intermediate phase (Grades 4, 5 and 6)
- Senior phase (Grades 7, 8 and 9) (Department of Education, 1997:4, 11).

The term learner refers to all learners, ranging from early childhood education through to adult education. The terms 'pupils' or 'students' at school and higher education levels are therefore replaced by the term 'learners' (Department of Education, 1997:xviii).

The focus of this study is on the Grade 7 learners in the senior phase. Grade 7 learners are in their final year of the primary school. The developmental characteristics and developmental tasks of these young people (learners) will be discussed in Chapter Two.

1.12.2 Life skills

Life skills are essential skills that make life easier, and increase the possibility that individuals will realise their potential and become productive members of society (Rooth, 1997:6).

Rooth (1997:6) states that life skills refer to the skills necessary for successful living and learning. As children develop more life skills, the possibility is greater that they will be able to deal with problems, and even prevent some of them. As children develop life skills, they will have more opportunities for living the way they choose to live. Life skills help people to know what to do, how to do it, and when it is appropriate to do something. Life skills are the capabilities for behaving in a certain way that are beneficial to capacity building and successful living (Rooth, 1997:6).

Powell (1995:24) gives the following definition: "*Life skills are the life-coping skills consonant with the developmental tasks of the basic human development processes, namely those skills necessary to perform tasks for a given age and sex in the following areas of human development: psychosocial, physical-sexual, vocational, cognitive, moral, ego, and emotional.*"

Nelson-Jones (1993:10) states: "*Life skills are personally responsible sequences of self-helping choices in specific psychological skills areas conducive to mental wellness. People require a repertoire of life skills according to their developmental tasks and specific problems of living.*"

From these definitions it can be stated that life skills involve many important areas of human functioning and that the accomplishment of developmental tasks in late childhood and early adolescence (senior phase) depends on mastery of the life skills appropriate to the developmental stage and task.

Thus, life skills may be defined broadly as not only the skills but also the insight, awareness, knowledge, values, attitudes and qualities that are necessary to empower individuals and their communities to cope and engage successfully with life and its challenges in South African society.

1.12.3 Life skills education and training

Life skills education, Education for living, Life Orientation or the New Guidance replaces the previous Guidance and Health Education formats in the school. Rooth (1997:10) proposes

that life skills education is interchangeable with Education for living, Life Orientation and New Guidance.

Life skills education is the process of giving learners (in this instance children) the opportunities to develop and practise all the necessary life skills (Rooth, 1997:10).

It includes training in skills that will enhance social, emotional and psychological functioning, for example assertiveness training, conflict resolution, problem solving (White Paper for Social Welfare, 1997:95).

Life skills education and training in the present study deal with the preventive, promotive and developmental aspects of personal and interpersonal (social) skills. Such life skills programmes can be developed, facilitated and evaluated by social workers in the school context.

1.12.4 Programme and learning programme

Koontz, O'Donnell and Wehrich (1980:168-169) define programmes as: *"...a complex of goals, policies, procedures, rules, task assignments, steps to be taken, resources to be employed, and other elements necessary to carry out a given course of action; they are ordinarily supported by necessary capital and operating budgets... A primary program may call for many derivative programs... Thus one seldom finds that a program of any importance in enterprise planning stands by itself. It is usually a part of a complex system of programs, depending upon some and affecting others."*

The Department of Education's policy document for the senior phase (Grades 7 to 9) (1997:17) states that a learning programme is the vehicle through which the curriculum is implemented at various learning sites, such as schools. They are the sets of learning activities which will involve the learner in working towards the achievement of one or more specific outcomes. A learning programme includes critical outcomes; specific outcomes; assessment criteria; range statements; performance indicators and notional time. These elements will be discussed in Chapter 3 to provide guidelines for the social worker on the development of a life skills programme.

1.12.5 Life skills helping

Life skills helping is a people-centred approach to assisting clients and others to develop self-helping skills. It focuses on the problems and potentials of people in general. It takes psychological wellness, rather than psychological disturbance, as its starting point. Life skills helping aims at shifting the balance of clients' skills, strengths and weaknesses more in the direction of strengths (Nelson-Jones, 1993:31).

In the current study the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme will be people-centred so that learners can be empowered to help themselves.

1.12.6 Self-reliance

Self-reliance refers to the perceptions of personal capabilities, perceptions of personal significance, perceptions of personal power or influence over life; intrapersonal skills, interpersonal skills, systemic skills and judgmental skills (Glenn & Nelsen, 1989:48-49). In the current study a self-reliant child is likely to prove to be a successful, productive, capable human being when he/she possesses the following:

- Strong perceptions of personal capabilities. "I am capable."
- Strong perceptions of significance in primary relationships. "I contribute in meaningful ways and I am genuinely needed."
- Strong perceptions of personal power or influence over life. "I can influence what happens to me."
- Strong intrapersonal skills. The ability to understand personal emotions, to use that understanding to develop self-discipline and self-control, and to learn from experience.
- Strong interpersonal skills. The ability to work with others and develop friendships through communication, co-operation, negotiation, sharing, empathising and listening.
- Strong systemic skills. The ability to respond to the limits and consequences of everyday life with responsibility, adaptability, flexibility and integrity.
- Strong judgemental skills. The ability to use wisdom and evaluate situations according to appropriate values (Glenn & Nelsen, 1989:49-50).

1.12.7 Capacity building

The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:92) describes capacity-building as: "*The development of skills for the promotion and building of organisations. There are different levels of capacity-building: upgrading of skills; review and improvement of methods used to promote organisational development; planning and organisational evaluation; revision of organisational goals and objectives; and organisational restructuring. Also refers to the development of a learning organisation capable of a continuous self-development process. Generally used to refer to skills development in a wide range of areas, such as specialist knowledge and skills, popular education and training (e.g. life skills) and social competence promotion.*"

Capacity building is defined as a process which empowers people to become involved in the different initiatives of reconstruction and to participate efficiently in these (COSATU in IDASA, 1993:11).

In the present study, capacity building refers to the growth and development of people. It is also a process which assists in empowering people to become involved in the different initiatives of reconstruction in their schools and communities. Capacity building is a most important aspect, and a basic underlying theme, of life skills development.

1.12.8 Empowerment

Hopson & Scally (1981:53) declare that "power" means the ability to influence intentionally what happens to the individual in relation to other people and the physical world. To "empower" is to get in touch or help someone else get in touch with these abilities, such as powerfulness, helpfulness, self-empowerment.

The White Paper for Social Welfare (1997:93) describes empowerment as: "*The process of increasing personal, interpersonal and political power to enable individuals or collectives to improve their life situation. It requires the full participation of people in the formulation, implementation and evaluation of decisions determining the functioning and well-being of the society.*"

Rooth (1998:54) states that empowerment may be regarded as a process which enables people to gain control over their lives and centre on the idea of control. According to Rooth (1998:54), empowerment enables people to –

- believe in themselves,
- take control of their lives,
- feel in charge of what is happening to them and around them,
- feel motivated and confident about facing the challenges of life,
- achieve their optimal potential,
- become involved in political change,
- participate, and
- take ownership and control through collective political action.

Self-empowerment is a process, not an end state. One does not become “self-empowered”, but behaves in a more empowered way. The more empowered a person is, the more fulfilling his or her life will become.

1.13 CONTENTS OF RESEARCH REPORT

This chapter contains an introduction to the present study. The chapter is an orientation to the contextual and theoretical frameworks guiding the study, the statement of the problem and the aim and outcomes of the study, the research methodology employed and definitions of essential concepts. The remainder of this dissertation is divided into the following four chapters: **Chapter 2** consists of a literature survey of life skills education and training and the developmental characteristics and developmental tasks of learners in the senior phase of school. **Chapter 3** focuses on the design and development of the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme (intervention research). **Chapter 4** gives specific details of the research design, the implementation and the evaluation of the Personal and Interpersonal Life Skills Programme. It also contains a detailed account of the actual findings and interpretations of the research study. **Chapter 5** outlines the major conclusions drawn and the recommendations emanating from the study.