

THE LIFE-WORLD OF TRUANTS: GUIDELINES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL  
PSYCHOLOGIST

by

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## OPSOMMING

Daar is voldoende bewys dat storkiesdraai 'n betroubare voorspeller vir probleme gedurende die later jare is. Relevante navorsingstatistiek dui ook daarop dat die voorkoms van storkiesdraai kommerwekkend is. Teen hierdie agtergrond is die studie onderneem.

Die probleemstelling is as volg geformuleer:

- \* waaruit bestaan die leefwêreld van leerlinge wat storkiesdraai?
- \* hoe kan die opvoedkundige sielkundige riglyne beskryf om effektiewe berading aan die storkiesdraaiers te gee?

Die doel van die navorsing is derhalwe:

- \* om die leefwêreld van die storkiesdraaiers te verken en te beskryf en
- \* om riglyne daar te stel vir berading aan storkiesdraaiers.

Omdat die navorsing daarop gerig is om 'n in-diepte-studie van die leefwêreld van hierdie leerlinge te onderneem, is die kwalitatiewe navorsingsbenadering gevolg. Data is deur middel van fenomenologiese onderhoude en direkte waarneming ingesamel. Die data is volgens die beskrywende benadering ontleed.

Die resultate van hierdie empiriese ondersoek is met relevante literatuur vergelyk en unieke bydraes voortspruitend uit die onderhawige navorsing is geïdentifiseer. Temas wat deur die empiriese navorsing en uit die literatuur geïdentifiseer is, vorm die grondslag waarop riglyne vir die opvoedkundige sielkundige wat berading aan stokkiesdraaiers moet gee, neergelê word.



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## CHAPTER 1

## ORIENTATION TO THE RESEARCH

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Truancy, which according to Thompson and Rudolph (1992:513), is a deliberate absence from school without a valid reason, is a problem that probably dates back to the initial institution of large scale formal schooling. Although it may seem obvious that the reason for truancy is related to the fact that the truant prefers to be elsewhere, or that he finds the school an unpleasant place to be, the underlying reasons for truancy are more difficult to pinpoint.

Research conducted in 1991 and 1992 in the United Kingdom (O'Keefe, 1994:48), and which included 150 schools, revealed that a significant number of pupils of compulsory school-going age become involved in truancy. Statistics reported by the research team themselves, based on a survey which involved questionnaires, suggested that if the results of their survey could be extrapolated to all schools, then a 95 per cent confidence interval for the mean truancy level in schools, is between 29.7 per cent and 32.4 per cent. About two thirds (68%), of all schools should have truancy levels between 22.7 per cent and 39.3 per cent, and 96 per cent of all schools should have levels between 14.4 per cent and 47.4 per cent. If these statistics could be used as a guide to estimate an average of truants per school, the enormity of the prevalence of truancy becomes evident.

According to McWhirter and McWhirter (1993:58), truants tend to have what is termed a "dropouts perspective". They claim that dropouts inter alia tend to leave school for the following reasons:

- \* a dislike for school, with the opinion that school is boring and not relevant to their needs
- \* low academic achievement and poor grades

- \* poverty, a desire to work full-time, and a need for money, and
- \* a lack of belonging and a sense that nobody cares about them

Some of these attributes might thus also obtain for many truants.

Paterson (Wardaugh, 1990: 744), proposes two broad categories of truants, namely the "endangered" truant (also termed the delinquent or morally endangered truant), and the "fearful" truant (also termed the school phobic or abused truant). The "endangered" truant is prone to falling into trouble when absent from school, while the "fearful" truant wishes to go to school, but is afraid to do so.

Truancy is also listed by Kapp (1990:119) as one of the behaviours manifested by juvenile delinquents along with various other delinquencies such as theft, running away from home, use and distribution of drugs, burglary, vandalism, assault and robbery, thus suggesting that truancy is associated with these misdemeanours. Healy (Tyerman, 1968:10), notes that truancy is the root of all these misbehaviours, and he described truancy as "the kindergarten of crime". In 1944 Burt (1944:455) already referred to truancy as "the first step on the downward stair to crime".

According to Hersov and Berg (1980:67), truancy is a reliable predictor of difficulties in later life. They also report that school truancy significantly predicts four subsequent child events: being held back in elementary school, dropping out of high school, leaving the parental home before the age of 18, and marriage before the age of 18.

Thus, it would appear that the prognosis for truants in terms of completing their schooling, securing stable employment and fulfilling responsible citizenship, without being a burden to their future spouses, families, communities and the state, is rather uncertain. Against this background, there can be little argument that the phenomenon of truancy is serious enough to

warrant a counseling programme that will be effective in treating truants in the light of their problems in such a way that they will obtain a balanced perspective of the value of regular school attendance.

In South Africa, the incidence of truancy, in the old racially biased provincial education schooling system of the House of Assembly (HOA), could be measured quite accurately, simply by consulting the class register over a period of time. Through investigating the circumstances surrounding the absenteeism the teacher could quite easily determine whether such circumstances met the criteria for classification of such absentees as truants. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for the schools which were under the jurisdiction of the former Department of Education and Training (DET), of which the researcher was an employee for a number of years. Not only were records of attendance not kept properly in many instances to be able to determine how often a pupil was absent, but even if attendance records had been kept properly, the possible reasons for staying away from school, such as political violence, intimidation, and caring for younger siblings, do also not meet the criteria for classifying such an absentee as a truant. What is however also true, is that large numbers of former DET pupils could have exploited the prevailing situation at the time and could have stayed away from school for reasons that may well have qualified them as truants. Many schools served by the former House of Delegates (HOD), and the former House of Representatives (HOR), were, maybe, just as seriously affected by the political climate as the DET schools. The level of absenteeism related to unrest situations in the former HOD and HOR schools makes it just as difficult to distinguish between the "truants" and the "bona fide" absentees during those turbulent times.

For this reason it was decided to restrict the scope of the present study to truants in schools which traditionally fell under the provincial education system of the former House of Assembly.

## 1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Truancy from school may hold dire consequences for the child's school career, such as possible underachievement and dropping out of school, which could in turn effect his career opportunities and chances of realizing his potential as a human being to the full.

As an intern educational psychologist at the Alberton Educational Aid Centre, the present researcher has come to duly realize that part of the duty of the educational psychologist is to counsel truants. However, information that is currently available on the life-world of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy, is somewhat outdated, yet such information which is relevant and vital to truancy counseling in the "new" Republic of South Africa.

Against the background of the above discussion, the problem being researched in this study may be formulated as follows:

- \* What constitutes the life-world of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy?
- \* How can the educational psychologist describe guidelines to effectively counsel pupils identified as demonstrating truancy?

## 1.3 THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this research, therefore, is:

- \* to explore and describe the life-world of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy, and
- \* to describe guidelines for counseling pupils identified as demonstrating truancy based on the findings of the research.

#### 1.4 PARADIGMATIC PERSPECTIVE

Because the description of the life-world of a pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is an intimate and subjective description, the qualitative approach is selected for this particular research. For this reason the paradigmatic perspective of the researcher is expounded.

The paradigmatic perspective of a researcher refers to "the world-view that defines for the researcher the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994:107).

The present research follows a qualitative paradigm, and is concerned mainly with process. For this purpose, it is necessary to state briefly the paradigmatic perspective of the researcher.

##### 1.4.1 PARADIGM

The paradigmatic perspective of the present researcher is that of the systems theory, since the child as an individual exists within a given ecological part-system of his family, school, and peer culture. The interpersonal relationships of the individual, family, peer group, and society are interdependent (Fennel, 1993:6-7). The family home forms a component of the child's life-world, and the assumption is that every individual in the family influences the functioning of the entire system (Van Niekerk, 1986:124). The functioning of every part of the system is, in turn, individually and/or collectively influenced by the system. The researcher believes that all behavioural problems manifested by children, including the demonstration of truancy, are symptomatic of a wider pathogenic environmental system which includes the family, home, school and peer relationships.

According to Jordaan and Jordaan (1989:40), human experience and action cannot be properly understood if they are divorced from

the context in which they occur in everyday life. This serves as a precondition to grasping the actions and experiences that an individual may communicate.

Human experience and action can be studied by means of the contextual analysis and synthesis of part-systems and sub-systems which together form a whole system, where the term "system" is understood as being an open hierarchic organisation which functions interdependently.

According to Jordaan and Jordaan (1989:41-42), every human being functions within an ecological, an intrapsychic, a physical and a metaphysical part-system (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1989:41-42). The ecological part-system emphasizes the interdependent relationship between the living organism and his environment (see also Goldenberg & Goldenberg, 1985:96). Added to this, it is suggested that the human being is in contact with the natural-physical, and physical-cultural features of the world in which he lives. These features include the geographical environment, climatic conditions, population density, living conditions, and so forth. All of these elements influence a person's experiences and behaviour (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1989:42). A person's experiences and behaviour are also elicited, maintained and changed through interpersonal relationships which develop from the earliest contact with parents and other members of the family. Patterns of communication are established, and in the course of time they are expanded to include "significant others". A person's experiences and behaviour are also elicited, maintained, and changed in group situations. These include formal and informal groups of which the developing person is a member (such as his family), or becomes a member of (such as his peer group). The ecological part-system is also concerned with a person's actual participation in group activities and the consequences of such participation. A person's experiences and behaviour are furthermore also elicited, maintained and changed in societal situations with their characteristic cultural, sub-cultural, and economic structures, amongst others. Each person interacts with



the physical outside world which includes on the one hand real physical objects, conditions, people and events, and with the symbolic outside world which includes all knowledge and perceptions, on the other hand, and also with an inner world. This all constitutes information about the outside world which is absorbed by a person into his inner world in accordance with how it is subjectively experienced and understood. The inner world is, therefore, a reconstruction of the outside world as the person sees and experiences it (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1989:44).

The intrapsychic part-system includes the perceptual (to do with the senses), the cognitive (concerned with thinking, learning and remembering), the emotional (feelings), the dispositional (tendency to behave in a certain way), and the self (self-concept). The physical part-system refers to the biological aspects of the human being, such as the quality of his physical faculties, and the state of his physical health, while the metaphysical relates to things pertaining to nature. The pupil identified as demonstrating truancy exists within all the part-systems mentioned, and as such, that which he believes, also influences his behaviour and attitudes towards others. The point being made, is that to understand a person, it is firstly necessary to grasp his inner world (see Bytendijk in Van Den Berg & Linschoten, 1963: Frontispiece). This being the case, it is fair to assume that the family home, school, peer group and society within which the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy exists, individually and collectively all have an influence on his life-world.

#### 1.4.2 Concept clarification

##### 1.4.2.1 The educational psychologist

The educational psychologist is concerned with the development of the child in totality. In this research, the researcher as an educational psychologist interacts with the child identified as demonstrating truancy, through collaboration and observation. He

realizes that regular attendance at school plays a major role in enabling the child to actualize this vital stage of development, and that the alleviation of the problem of truancy is vital to the child's ability to realize his full potential (cf Van Niekerk, 1986:43).

#### 1.4.2.2 Educational psychology

Educational psychology focuses specifically on problems affecting children during the course of their school career, irrespective of whether the problem be of an intellectual, emotional, behavioural, or academic nature. The sciences which play a role in addressing these factors include specifically psychology and education (Van Niekerk, 1986:36).

#### 1.4.2.3 The child

The child needs to interact with those on whom he is dependent for his physical and emotional wellbeing. Children with specific needs, including those children identified as demonstrating truancy, also fit this category.

As soon as a child is identified as manifesting problems, in this case the demonstration of truancy, and the question of how this symptom may be alleviated arises, the territory of the educational psychologist has been penetrated (Van Niekerk, 1986:33). The child who has problems is dependent on the educational psychologist to interact with him in order to help him to overcome the obstacles which may prevent him from realizing his potential.

#### 1.4.2.4 The task of the educational psychologist

Linking up with the previous paragraphs, the task of the educational psychologist is to diagnose problems preventing children from developing normally, and to treat the child with problem(s) through counseling, therapy or referral to other

professionals. The educational psychologist, furthermore, is required to fulfil an advisory, preventative, guiding and therapeutic function in terms of the child with scholastic, emotional, and/or behavioural problems (Van Niekerk, 1986:43).

#### 1.4.3 Methodological assumptions

In any qualitative methodology, inductive logic prevails. Categories emerge from informants, rather than being identified "a priori" by the researcher. This emergence provides rich "context"-bound information, leading to patterns or theories that help explain a phenomenon (Cresswell, 1994:153-157). The accuracy and reliability of this information, however, needs to be checked by means of verification.

#### 1.4.4 Central statement

The central statement of this research is that "the findings from the exploration and description of the life-world of pupils demonstrating truancy provide the basis for generating guidelines for counseling these pupils".

### 1.5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

The research design of this study, and the methods utilized are covered in greater detail in chapter 2. At this stage suffice it to point out that because the life-world of pupils demonstrating truancy is explored, a qualitative rather than a quantitative methodology is employed.

The research design is exploratory, yet descriptive, and it has a contextual interest. Because truancy is one of a number of criteria by which juvenile delinquents are classified for placement in an industrial school (Kapp, 1990:120), its unit of analysis is targetted at pupils resident at such a school in the Alberton/Heidelberg district of the Gauteng Department of

Education.

The research method constitutes two phases. It is henceforth briefly outlined; firstly, with reference to phase 1 which includes the sampling of the research subjects, the pilot study, the data collection, the data analysis, the deliberations on the trustworthiness as well as the ethical considerations of the research, including a literature control of the research. Secondly, phase 2, includes a description of guidelines for the educational psychologist in counseling pupils who demonstrate truancy, as well as certain conclusions and recommendations from the research, bearing in mind certain limitations.

#### 1.5.1 Sampling

- \* The target population consists of children who deliberately absent themselves from school (see paragraph 1.1).
- \* Sample selection: A purposive sample is selected from the target population (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985:201).
- \* Criteria for inclusion in the study: see paragraph 2.3.1

#### 1.5.2. Pilot study

Originally, one pupil from the sample is part of a pilot phenomenological interview which is audiotaped, while direct observations are recorded as field notes. Once the methods used in the pilot study is found to be adequate, additional pupils are identified as subjects to be interviewed.

#### 1.5.3 Data collection

The phenomenological method of interviewing is employed, with the interviews being semi-structured (see Poggenpoel, 1993:1-3), in order to obtain a description of the life-world of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy. The central request presented in the interview is: "Tell me about your life-world".

Direct observation is also utilized, with observations being recorded in the form of field notes after each interview in order to describe the entire interview situation, including the researcher's impressions and experiences. The idea is to maintain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of the life-world of the interviewee. The interviewer does not only register and interpret what is said, but also how it is said. This entails that he must be observant of and able to interpret vocalization, facial expression, and other bodily gestures accurately and reliably (Kvale 1983:175).

#### 1.5.4 Data analysis

The information is analysed according to a combination of the descriptive analysis method as proposed by Giorgi (Omery, 1983:57), and the content analysis method as proposed by Kerlinger (1986:479-481). The combination of these two data-analysis methods serves as a triangulation measure, which increases the trustworthiness of the research.

A second triangulation measure is the employment of follow-up interviews with some of the pupils in order to verify if the data obtained is a true reflection of their life-world.

A further triangulation measure includes the provision of a protocol (see annexure B) for the analysis of the data to an independent coder, who codes the data on his/her own. The researcher and the independent coder then meet to obtain the highest degree of agreement on identified themes, as well as on the connection between these themes (Giorgi in Omery, 1983:57).

#### 1.5.5 The requirement of trustworthiness

The question of trustworthiness is dealt with in greater detail in chapter 2, suffice it to say that Lincoln and Guba (1985:290-301), suggest the following criteria in order to enhance the trustworthiness of any research:

- a) truth value, that is the faith that the researcher has in the authenticity of the findings of the research
- b) applicability, that is the degree to which the findings may be applied to other circumstances and contexts
- c) consistency, that is the extent to which the findings of the present empirical research would remain consistent in the event of the research being replicated with similar pupils who demonstrate truancy, and in similar circumstances
- d) neutrality, that is the extent to which the findings of the empirical research are exclusively a function of the respondents and the conditions of the research, and not those of the researcher.

#### 1.5.6 Ethical considerations

In order to ensure ethical correctitude, the following are taken into consideration: obtaining permission to conduct the research, maintaining the confidentiality and anonymity of pupils involved in the empirical research, ensuring that their privacy is respected, and appropriate termination and provision of research assistance; all of which are expounded in more detail in chapter 2.

#### 1.5.7 Literature control

Findings of the empirical research are compared with relevant literature, so that the similarities, differences, and unique contributions may be identified [Poggenpoel, 1993:8].

#### 1.5.8 Guidelines for the educational psychologist in counseling truants

The themes emerging from the present empirical research are presented in an educational psychological perspective. Guidelines for the educational psychologist in counseling pupils demonstrating truancy are developed on the basis of the themes

identified through the data analysis in relation to the themes identified in relevant research literature.

## 1.6 THE COURSE OF THE STUDY

The following topics are covered in ensuing chapters:

Chapter 2: The research design and method

Chapter 3: Data analysis and interpretation of the research results

Chapter 4: Literature control

Chapter 5: Guidelines for the educational psychologist in counseling pupils demonstrating truancy

Chapter 6: Conclusions, limitations and recommendations

## 1.7 SUMMARY



This chapter covered the following aspects of the research:

- \* background and rationale
- \* statement of the problem
- \* purpose of the study
- \* paradigmatic perspective, and
- \* a brief description of the research design and method.

The research design and method are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 2

## RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHOD

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

The aim of chapter 2 is to provide a chain of evidence by means of a dense holistic description of the entire research process, to ensure that if a different researcher should undertake the same study in a similar context, he would be able to come up with similar, if not the same, findings regarding the life-world of children demonstrating truancy.

According to Mouton and Marais (1994:7), research may be regarded as a collaborative human activity in which social reality is studied objectively, with the aim of obtaining a valid understanding of it.

The purpose of this research is:

- \* to explore and describe the life-world of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy, and
- \* to describe guidelines for counseling pupils identified as demonstrating truancy.

## 2.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

Since this research deals with the life-world of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy, a qualitative, explorative, descriptive, and contextual research design is considered to be the most appropriate, especially because it is aimed at gaining an in-depth insight into the life-world of these pupils (Van Leent in Mouton & Marais 1994:168).

A brief exposition is subsequently given of each of these descriptions to further motivate the choice of the research



design.

### 2.2.1 Qualitative research

The study is concerned with the life-world of the truant. A qualitative approach to the research is considered to be fitting for the following reasons:

- \* The qualitative approach requires that the researcher interprets the real world from the perspective of the subjects of his investigation (Mouton & Marais, 1994:205).
- \* It allows for the unique life-world of every case to be explored individually.
- \* It assumes that for an interpretation, the researcher needs intersubjective personal knowledge (Mouton & Marais, 1994:205).
- \* Any attempt to "penetrate to the essence of a phenomenon can only be made by means of qualitative approaches" (Mouton & Marais, 1994:169).

### 2.2.2 Explorative research

The point of departure of the investigator is one of "not knowing" what the life-world of pupils demonstrating truancy constitutes. The design is exploratory, because it enables the researcher to gain new insights into the phenomenon under consideration, the specific phenomenon in this research being the "life-world of pupils demonstrating truancy". For this reason, the researcher is willing to examine fresh ideas and suggestions, rather than allow the research to be guided by any pre-held ideas or hypotheses. Above all, the understanding of the very essence of a phenomenon can best be gained by exploring it through in-depth interviews (see Mouton & Marais, 1994:43).

### 2.2.3 Descriptive research

The life-world of pupils demonstrating truancy is described as

accurately as possible, since accuracy is an important consideration in descriptive studies (Mouton & Marais, 1994:44). Guidelines based on the results obtained from the research are described to enable the educational psychologist to effectively counsel pupils identified as demonstrating truancy.

#### 2.2.4 Contextual research

The research is idiographic in the sense that it is bound by the unique context of each individual (truant) under investigation, namely, his life-world. Descriptive-exploratory studies tend to be more contextually bound, rather than having a generalising interest (Mouton & Marais, 1994:121).

### 2.3 RESEARCH METHOD

The research takes place in two phases, with this chapter providing a dense, holistic chain of evidence on the entire research process.

The aim of phase 1 (fieldwork) is to obtain firsthand information from the subjects themselves regarding their life-world. This phase includes the sampling, the pilot study, the data collection, the data analysis, debating the trustworthiness, and ensuring ethical correctness of the research, as well as the literature control.

Phase 2 includes the explication of guidelines for an effective truancy counseling programme, based on the research results, drawing of conclusions, making recommendations, and pointing out possible limitations of the investigation.

#### 2.3.1. Sampling

An illustration of the target group, the way in which the participants are selected, as well as the criteria for inclusion

in the study, is provided.

\* **Target group**

The target group of the research includes those pupils who have been identified as demonstrating truancy. These are pupils who deliberately absent themselves from school without a valid reason (cf Thompson & Rudolph, 1992:513).

\* **Selection of participants**

Purposive sampling is employed in selecting the participants (see Burns & Grove, 1987:75), with all the subjects having been placed at an industrial school through the judicial system, with the demonstration of compulsive truancy being one of the reasons for their placement at the school. The industrial school in question is conveniently situated within the district covered by the aid centre at which the researcher is resident.

\* **Criteria for inclusion in the study:**

The criteria for inclusion in this study are laid down as follows: To be included in the sample, a pupil must:

- a) be of compulsory school-going age, and
- b) be enrolled in a secondary school, and
- c) have been identified as demonstrating truancy, and
- d) have been placed in terms of the Child Care Act of 1983, in an industrial school by the judicial system for which one of the reasons is the demonstration of compulsive truancy (see Kapp, 1990:120), and
- e) be able to speak and understand either English or Afrikaans.

### 2.3.2 Pilot study

A pilot study is first undertaken by the researcher, in order to ascertain whether any adjustments need to be made before proceeding with the research proper.

### 2.3.3 Data collection

The method of collecting data is subsequently elucidated in some detail.

#### \* Phenomenological interviews

Phenomenological research entails an inductive, descriptive research technique, which aims to describe the total systematic structure of a phenomenon (Omery, 1983:50). The purpose of the phenomenological interview is to describe and understand the central themes which the interviewees experience and live towards (Kvale, 1983:174).

"Bracketting" and "intuiting" are used as control measures to ensure the credibility of the description. Through "bracketting" the researcher tries to ignore all possible knowledge that he may possess regarding the phenomenon under investigation, in this case the pupils' life-world. In this way all pre-conceived ideas are eliminated, thus providing an opportunity for the researcher to observe all facets of the phenomenon objectively (Oiler in Burns & Grove, 1987:80). The categories and themes which emerge from the empirical research and the literature study are also eventually grouped according to the part-systems within which all human beings function (see chapter 1).

"Intuiting" is that component of the process during which the researcher focuses all his attention and concentration on the phenomenon under investigation (Oiler in Burns & Grove 1987:80).

The researcher in this study conducts semi-structured interviews with pupils demonstrating truancy, and records them on an audiotape. The central request presented in each interview is: "Tell me about your life-world". Probing questions asked after the central question is posed, flow from each subject's description of his life-world, and are asked in order to obtain a clearer picture of the pupil's life-world. Interviews are terminated as soon as it becomes apparent that the pool of data

is saturated and the themes start to repeat themselves.

To ensure that the phenomenon is researched as it is actually experienced, the researcher approaches the study without any pre-conceived expectations and categories, and refrains from establishing any theoretical framework (Omery, 1983:50). For this reason the researcher did not conduct any preliminary investigation on the life-world of pupils demonstrating truancy prior to the research. After the data have been analysed, follow-up interviews are conducted with some of the interviewees, in order to clarify whether the findings of the research reflect a true picture of the life-world of such a subject in question.

\* The role of the researcher

a) Use of self

Use of the self is a key factor in phenomenological research, since the researcher is able to react to the responses of the pupil, and thus provide the interview with greater depth. The deliberate use of empathy and intuition also assists the interviewer by allowing him to become closely involved with the life-world of the pupils. It helps the researcher to remain open to the perceptions of the pupils, rather than to give his own meaning to their experiences (Burns & Grove, 1987:80).

Important communication techniques that are employed by the researcher include:

- \* reflection of content and feeling, that occurs when the researcher communicates to the pupil how he understands the pupil's perceptions, experiences and feelings
- \* paraphrasing, that entails reformulating a statement made by the pupil
- \* summarising, that is the feedback which is given to the pupil on the general content of the interview or part thereof
- \* a request for clarifications, which is an attempt to obtain greater clarity when the pupil's response is vague

confused, or unclear and

- \* a request for examples and descriptions (Poggenpoel, 1993:8).

#### b) Creation of a relaxed atmosphere

It is important for the researcher to establish a good relationship (rapport) with the pupil in order to reduce any initial distrust and, where possible, to eliminate it completely.

#### c) Field notes

Directly after each interview, the researcher records field notes of the interview situation, as well as his impressions. Field notes may be divided into four categories, namely:

- \* observation notes, in which the researcher records what he saw and heard during the interview
- \* theoretical notes, which refer to deliberate, controlled efforts to extract meaning from observation notes
- \* methodological notes which include notes on operational practices such as the time schedule, the sequence, and the physical setup and
- \* personal notes, such as the researcher's feelings and experiences during the interview (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:183-185).

#### 2.3.4. Data analysis

The data pool which is analysed consists of the transcribed interviews and the researcher's field notes.

The data are analysed according to a combination of the methods suggested by Giorgi (Omery, 1983:57), and Kerlinger (1986:479-481).

From the outset "bracketing" and "intuiting" are applied as control measures, while the researcher reads through the entire transcription in order to obtain a holistic picture. The

transcription is then read a second time, but slowly, and units of analysis are identified by underlining words and themes. Units of analysis are words which indicate ideas, perceptions and feelings, and which make it possible to identify continuous themes.

After the themes have been identified, the chief categories are identified and defined. The chief categories are then divided into sub-categories, and grouped into their respective part-systems in accordance with the paradigmatic perspective of the educational psychologist.

A protocol of the method used by the researcher is set up and is subsequently provided to an independent coder (who possesses vast experience in the field of qualitative research), who then codes and categorises the data on his/her own. Following these two independent codings, the researcher and the coder then meet in order to try and obtain the greatest possible degree of consensus regarding the identified themes as well as the connection between them.

Finally, the data are quantified. Correlations with respect to the descriptions and experiences of all the pupils interviewed are then listed in order of priority, after which priority values are accorded to the themes.

### 2.3.5 Trustworthiness

The model for evaluating trustworthiness proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985:290-301), identifies four aspects which contribute to the trustworthiness of any research, namely: truth value, applicability, consistency and neutrality.

#### 2.3.5.1 Truth value

The truth value of research in this case refers to trust in the authenticity of the findings from the interviews, as well as the

context within which the interviews were conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). The discovery of the human experience as it is genuinely actualised, ensures truth value (Krefting, 1991:215).

#### Control measures: Credibility

Control measures to ensure the truth value of the research are discussed subsequently.

#### \* Credibility

The following techniques can be applied in order to raise the credibility of the research.

##### a) Triangulation:

The first use of triangulation is introduced by virtue of the fact that data regarding the life-world of pupils demonstrating truancy are collected by means of phenomenological interviews which are recorded on audiotape, as well as through direct observations, which are recorded as field notes.

The second triangulation measure is applied with the data analysis, where the data are interpreted according to a combination of descriptive analysis as proposed by Giorgi, and content analysis as proposed by Kerlinger.

The literature control is a further control measure. Through the literature control the findings of this research are compared with relevant other research findings, in order to identify similarities, differences and unique contributions.

##### b) Clarification with experts:

The experts in this research are the pupils identified as demonstrating truancy themselves. To ensure that their original meanings are reflected in the findings of the research, the researcher returns to some of the pupils, and clears his findings with them. The guidelines for counseling pupils identified as demonstrating truancy that are generated from the research



findings, are eventually discussed with registered educational psychologists in order to control their feasibility and validity.

c) Peer group evaluation:

The input of other educational psychologists provides the researcher with the opportunity to remain open and honest, and in this way to rid himself of emotions and feelings which may influence (or may have influenced) his good judgement.

d) Authority of the researcher:

The researcher has completed the B.Ed. and the training component of the M.Ed. course in educational psychology at the Rand Afrikaans University. He is currently serving an internship at the Alberton Educational Aid Centre in order to eventually register as an educational psychologist with the South African Medical and Dental Council.

e) Structural coherence:

Consistent focusing on the life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is manifested during the entire run of the interviews, coding and analysis of the data. Furthermore, the counseling guidelines generated are based on the life-world of these pupils.

### 2.3.5.2 Applicability

With qualitative research, a phenomenon is studied in its unique, natural context, which allows little opportunity for external control of variables. Because each situation is unique, there is little chance of any generalisability of research findings (Krefting, 1991:216). It is for this reason that reference is made to applicability of findings when dealing with qualitative research. Applicability refers to the extent to which the findings of a specific research may be applied to another context, or other respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:290). Findings may be transferred, but not generalised.

**Control measures: Transferability**

Some of the control measures to ensure the applicability of the research are subsequently expounded.

**\* Sample selection**

A purposive sample is selected from the target group, yet making sure that each participant duly fulfils the criteria for inclusion in the research (see par. 2.3.1).

**\* Transferability**

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985:316), the transferability of any research is mainly the responsibility of the person who wants to apply it, rather than that of the original researcher. However, in order to make the transferability of the study possible for another person, the researcher envisages presenting a "dense" data basis of the research, which includes a description of the sample selection criteria for inclusion in the sample, as well as verbatim quoting from the interviews.

**2.3.5.3 Consistency**

Consistency refers to the degree to which the findings of the research will remain consistent should the research be replicated with a similar sample and in a similar context (Krefting, 1991:216).

**Control measures: Dependability**

Some of the control measures to ensure the consistency of research are subsequently expounded.

**\* Dependability**

A dense description of the research methodology is presented to enhance the reliability of the research. Both the process of the research as well as the product (the data, findings, analysis and recommendations), are looked at.

**\* Step-by-step replication**

A second control measure is "step-by-step" replication. To enhance standardisation, the same steps are followed with each interview, namely: obtain written permission from the district director of education and the principal of the institution where the pupils are resident, to interview each subject; obtain the consent of each subject of the research to be interviewed; explain to the subject what is expected of him; and present the central request to each subject in exactly the same words.

**\* Coding and decoding procedure**

A final control measure is the application of a coding/decoding procedure (Krefting, 1991:216). An expert with extensive experience in the field of qualitative research is appointed as an independent coder. After the interviews have been transcribed and coded by the researcher, a protocol of the data analysis is presented to the independent coder, who encodes and categorises the data on his/her own, before meeting with the researcher to discuss the results and to obtain the greatest possible degree of consensus.

**2.3.5.4 Neutrality**

Neutrality eliminates the influence of any possible bias that the researcher may possess in the research procedure and in the findings. It refers to the degree to which the findings are exclusively a function of the respondents and the conditions of the research and not those of the researcher.

**Control measures: Confirmability**

Some of the control measures to ensure the neutrality of the study are now henceforth expounded.

**\* Confirmability**

The two techniques used to ensure the verifiability of the research are: chain of evidence and triangulation.

**a) Chain of evidence:**

In order to make a chain of evidence possible, records are kept of the following:

- raw data, including audiotapes of the interviews, field notes and research results
- data reduction and analysis - descriptions of the field notes, collective information, quantitative summaries and theoretical notes
- reconstruction of the data and the summaries: such as the structuring of categories (themes, definitions and relationships), findings and conclusions, the final report with the integration of the concepts relationships and interpretations
- process notes, which include notes about the methodology, trustworthiness as well as chain of evidence notes
- research presentation and personal notes, and
- pilot study forms, preliminary schedule and observation format (Lincoln & Guba, 1985:327).

**b) Triangulation:**

Triangulation is also a means of controlling variability. This entails the same measures as are expounded in paragraph 2.3.5.1 (a).

**2.3.6 , Ethical considerations**

A discussion of the ethical considerations applicable to the research is subsequently presented.

**\* Permission**

Written permission is obtained from the District Director of Education (Albertyn/Heidelberg) of the Gauteng Department of Education, as well as the principal of the institution where the pupils are resident, and from the pupils themselves.

\* Confidentiality and anonymity

The names of the pupils participating in the research are withheld. In the event of their anonymity being threatened, all research records will be destroyed.

\* Privacy

The researcher enforces the necessary precautionary measures to ensure that the dignity and integrity of the pupils are protected. They are free to think and behave as they please, without interruption and without the possibility that their private behaviour or thoughts will ever be misused in order to embarrass them (see The South African Nursing Association, 1991:2/3).

\* Termination

Despite the fact that the pupil may have initially agreed to participate in the study, the research is immediately terminated should such a pupil wish to withdraw from the study. Research is also terminated in the event of the study not proceeding according to the standards layed down as planned (The South African Nursing Association, 1991:5).

\* Provision of research assistance

Feedback on the findings and recommendations of the research is provided to relevant persons as soon as conveniently possible.

### 2.3.7 Literature control

The results of the research are compared with those of similar research and with relevant literature. In this way similarities, differences and unique contributions of the research are identified.

### 2.3.8 Truancy counseling guidelines

Information obtained from the research and literature control are utilized to form the basis of guidelines for counseling pupils

identified as demonstrating truancy. These guidelines are logically inferred from both the present empirical research and the literature control (Copi, 1986:3), and are eventually discussed with colleague educational psychologists in order to obtain clarity on their applicability.

### 2.3.9 Summary

This chapter provides a dense holistic description of the entire research process, including the research design and the research method. The qualitative approach to research is employed, and the method of collecting data is through phenomenological interviews and direct observation only. The method of data analysis, as well as the measures to be implemented in order to ensure the trustworthiness of the research are also expounded.

The data analysis as well as the discussion and interpretation of the empirical research results are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 3

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF THE RESULTS

## 3.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the results of the empirical research are illustrated and briefly discussed and interpreted.

## 3.2 OPERATIONALISATION OF THE FIELDWORK

The empirical research process commenced with a formal written request to the District Director of the Gauteng Department of Education to conduct the research at a school within District S4. After written permission was granted by the district director, the principal of an industrial school within the district was approached, who subsequently agreed to allow pupils from his school to be interviewed as part of the research project. This was followed by a discussion with the two resident psychologists at the school, who implemented purposive sampling on behalf of the researcher in selecting the subjects to be included in the research, yet according to the criteria laid down (see paragraph 1.5.1). Once the sample was selected, permission was obtained from the pupils themselves to be interviewed. Formal appointments were then arranged with the school for the interviews to be conducted in the offices of the resident psychologists on the school premises. Each subject was interviewed privately by the researcher using the interviewee's home language. The researcher audiotaped the interviews and made field notes of his observations. The first audiotaped interview between the researcher and a subject formed part of a pilot study for the research, and was transcribed by the researcher, who then coded the transcriptions according to a set protocol, in order to identify the underlying themes and categories. After having satisfied himself of the feasibility and correctness of the procedure, additional interviews were conducted by the

researcher, and the same procedure that was followed with the first interview, was repeated in each interview. Once the themes and categories became saturated, the interviewing of subjects was terminated. This point was reached after the fourth interview, and because of the fact that many of the categories and themes identified in the pilot study correlated with those in subsequent interviews, it was decided to include the pilot study in the formal research. After the coding of the last interview by the researcher was completed, one of the subjects from the four interviewees was randomly selected by the researcher, in order to verify the facts obtained from the relevant interview. Finally the researcher presented the interview transcriptions and the protocol of the coding procedure which he followed, to an independent coder (a researcher who is well acquainted with qualitative research), who then coded the transcriptions on her own. This was followed by a meeting between the researcher and the independent coder, during which the themes and categories were discussed, and consensus was reached regarding the categories and themes.



### 3.3 DATA ANALYSIS

Interviews were conducted with four pupils identified as demonstrating truancy. The four subjects were all male pupils, three of whom were English-speaking, and the fourth one was Afrikaans-speaking. In order to present the experiences of the pupils as authentically as possible, all the quotations that were selected from the interviews are written in the language in which the interview was conducted.

As explained in chapter 2, the data are analysed according to a combination of the methods of analysis proposed by Kerlinger (1986:479-481) and Giorgi (Omery, 1983:57). Field notes are integrated into the discussion as part of the data. The request presented during each interview was: "Tell me about your life-world".



### 3.3.1 Coding

Audiotapes of the interviews were transcribed. The researcher then worked through each transcription, and identified the units of analysis by underlining words and themes. Corresponding themes were grouped together into main and sub-categories, the field notes were integrated into these categories, and finally the categories were grouped into the ecological and the intrapsychic part-systems within which every human being functions (see paragraph 1.4.1).

A protocol (for an example see Annexure B) was set up by the researcher and provided to an independent coder – an expert in qualitative research – who then coded and categorised the transcriptions on her own. Thereafter, the researcher and the independent coder met to discuss the results, in order to reach the greatest possible degree of consensus regarding the categories.

### 3.3.2 Quantification of the results

The data were prioritised according to the degree of correlation with respect to the descriptions and experiences of all the subjects interviewed. The order of priority was then tabulated, after which priority values were accorded to the themes. The suggestion is not that those categories that manifested in only one or two of the interviews are of less importance, but the prioritising of categories is done simply to provide the reader with a more complete and overall picture.

## 3.4 DISCUSSION OF THE COLLECTIVE RESULTS OBTAINED FROM THE INTERVIEWS

The data obtained from the interviews are organised into categories and grouped into the part-systems within which they function. Direct quotations are presented verbatim, without

corrections, as part of the explanation of the categories. The quotations are addressed to the subjects in terms of the symbol 'S', where S1 refers to the first subject interviewed, S2 to the second, and so forth. Occasionally explanatory remarks placed between brackets are included in the verbatim quotations, by the researcher. The results are then briefly discussed and interpreted in accordance with the main and sub-categories. The number of pupils who described the same experiences, are indicated in tables.

Although themes are divided into main and sub-categories, in order to distinguish between them, these themes cannot really be regarded as separate. A category should not be seen in isolation, but as part of the greater "Gestalt". Categories which were included in the ecological part-system through grouping were domestic circumstances; factors within the school; and peer group pressure. Categories which were included in the intrapsychic part-system through grouping were, emotional considerations; feelings of insecurity; and lack of discipline.

#### 3.4.1 Category 1: Domestic circumstances

The life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is often characterised by unhappy domestic circumstances (Table 3.1). These circumstances have a major influence on the well-being of the pupil which could negatively affect his ability to settle into the typical school structure. It is the family home where the child's basic needs like those for food, warmth, and love as well as safety and security should be satisfied, and the child is dependent on his parents and guardians to provide for these needs. Furthermore, it is in the family home where the child is introduced to his first role models, and where he is exposed to examples of human relationships, handling of conflicts and disagreements, as well as the exercising of discipline and the practice of perseverance. It is so that what the child is initially exposed to in the family home, can have a marked influence on his entire future human existence.

Table 3.1 Domestic circumstances

| Category 1   | Domestic circumstances | n = 4 |
|--------------|------------------------|-------|
| Sub-category | Marital conflict       | 3     |
|              | Divorce                | 3     |
|              | Remarriage             | 3     |
|              | Sibling conflict       | 3     |
|              | Ineffectual parenting  | 2     |
|              | Bad stepparentage      | 2     |

Subsequently the category "domestic circumstances" is discussed in greater detail, with direct verbatim quotations from the subjects interviewed.

Marital conflict played a major role in the life-worlds of the pupils interviewed, which is also coupled to the aspect of fighting covered in category 4. It would appear that the role models that these pupils were exposed to, could be regarded as having a negative influence on their children's ability to cope with interpersonal relationship problems.

(S2): "I can remember they (my parents) used to fight a lot."

(S3): "My pa en ma was toe nog nie so kwaad vir mekaar (soos nou nie)."

(S4): "My mother and father always used to fight."

Divorce and the break-up of marriages in the early stages of the lives of some of the pupils seriously affected the stability of their interpersonal relationships. The separation of the parents meant that the children were not only torn apart between the mother and the father, but siblings were themselves also sometimes separated from each other, as well as from established friendships.

(S2): "My mother and father divorced when I was still small."

(S3): "Ek en my sussie het toe naweke by my ma gebly (en

gedurende die week by my pa)."

(S4): " When my parents divorced, I went with my dad."

Remarriage, more than once, also had an unsettling effect on the pupils. No sooner had they grown accustomed to single parenthood, then their lives were once again disrupted by the "intrusion" of a new, and mostly strange marriage partner, who was often regarded with suspicion and distrust.

(S2): "She married this Jay-Jay chap (whom I didn't like at all)."

(S3): "Voordat my pa en my stiefma getroud is, kon ons darem my pa nog gereeld sien."

(S4): "She was married twice before she married my dad (and their marriage only lasted a couple of years also)."

Sibling conflict emerged as a problem in the lives of all those pupils who had siblings. This is understandable in the light of the conflict that manifested between the parents, and when one appreciates the influence of their modelling behaviour on the young child.

(S2): "Me and my sister used to fight a lot."

(S3): "Ek en my suster het meer begin baklei."

(S4): "I didn't get on with my older brother."

Ineffectual parenting is coupled with the next sub-category, which is titled "bad stepparentage". It seems that the households of some of the subjects were characterised by a lot of complaining, physical abuse, accusation and dissatisfaction.

(S1): "All that she did was complain."

(S3): "Toe begin my pa my rondslaan."

Bad stepparentage was encountered by all the pupils who had stepparents. These pupils felt antagonistic towards their stepparents, and regarded them as an intrusion in their

relationship with the biological parent. The stepparent was not accepted at all.

(S2): "When my mother married him, my marks just dropped."

(S3): "Sy (my stiefma) het veroorsaak laat ek en my suster nie meer met my pa praat nie."

### 3.4.2 Category 2: Problems related to the school

The life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is characterised by a number of problems related to the school (Table 3.2). These range from poor scholastic performance to interpersonal relationship problems with teachers, including a number of other school related problems, which inevitably have a negative effect on the pupils attitude towards school.

Table 3.2 Problems related to the school

| Category 2   | Problems related to the school | n = 4 |
|--------------|--------------------------------|-------|
| Sub-category | Teacher relationships          | 4     |
|              | Changing schools               | 4     |
|              | School dislike                 | 4     |
|              | Poor scholastic performance    | 4     |
|              | Punishment                     | 3     |
|              | Tokenism                       | 3     |

It appears that the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is plagued by numerous problems with the school, as illustrated in some of the verbatim quotations from the interviews.

Teacher relationships seemed to play a major role in these pupils' attitude to, and co-operation with the school system. Each of the subjects interviewed had at least one negative encounter with a teacher (or teachers) in the school (or schools) that they attended. Problematic teacher relationships inevitably had an impact on these pupils' enthusiasm regarding school attendance.

- (S1): "Those teachers they make you hate going to school."  
 (S2): "The teachers weren't much help."  
 (S3): "Daardie onderwysers was nie gepla met jou as jy 'n probleem het nie."  
 (S4): "She (the teacher) didn't like me, and I never did any work in her class."

Changing schools was also cited as a contributory factor to the problems experienced by these children. The fact that moving schools involved a change of environment and the disruption of established relationships and habits seemed to play a role in the pupils' negative attitude towards being at school.

- (S2): "From there ( the new school) I had problems with school."  
 (S3): "Toe het die probleme begin, ek wou nie in daai skool wees nie."  
 (S4): "I had to go to school in Eikenhof...I didn't like it, so I just stayed away."

School dislike clearly emerged as a major contributory factor towards the demonstration of truancy by the pupils. It seems that the fact that they were basically forced to attend school, and that they had no say in the matter, made them resent the idea of attending school even more. Added to this, it appeared that these pupils felt that attending school simply prevented them from having fun, or doing whatever they felt like doing. Lack of suitable supervision in the family home, coupled to a lack of self-discipline could possibly have contributed to this attitude.

- (S1): "I hated the idea of school all together."  
 (S2): "I just never wanted to go to school."  
 (S3): "Ek het genoeg gehad van skool."  
 (S4): "I didn't like it (school), so I just stayed away."

Poor scholastic performance seemed to be related to the inability

of the pupils to settle down in the classroom/school, and apply themselves to the learning tasks. The distraction from their lessons at school seemed to stem from the fact that they were more interested in satisfying their own interests, which, needless to say, had nothing to do with school.

- (S1): "I had to repeat standard 2, because my marks weren't good enough."  
 (S2): "But I always only just passed."  
 (S3): "My punte was sleg in die eksamen en op my rapport."  
 (S4): "Maths was a big problem, but then I left that school."

Punishment inevitably formed part of the life-world of the pupils, but there were no suggestions that the methods of punishment used produced the desired effect on the pupils. On the contrary, the punishment that was meted out which included forfeiting of break-time and corporal punishment, seemed to make these pupils more resentful towards the schools involved.

- (S1): "She made me stand outside the headmasters office for the whole break."  
 (S2): "I got hidings from my dad, and the school suspended me."  
 (S3): "Toe gee die onderwyser my weer vier van die bestes."

Tokenism manifested in the sense that these pupils made it obvious that they were at school only in body, but not in spirit. In other words they were just going through the motions regarding their school work, giving one the impression that they felt that they could not gain anything meaningful or valuable from being at school.

- (S1): "Then I just sit there and keep quiet, make as if I'm listening."  
 (S2): "I just copied someone else's work."

(S3): "Ek het net gemaak of ek oplet."

### 3.4.3 Category 3: Peer group pressure

The life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy seems to indicate that he is particularly vulnerable to the acknowledgement of his fellow male and female peers. The need for recognition and acceptance by significant others is clearly very important to the pupil. The fact that he is governed by an external locus of control also means that making an impression on others is more important to him than striving for perfection. This manifests in him seeking to portray an image that will win him the admiration of his fellow pupils. He is also very vulnerable to the influence of others who display strong leadership qualities. This may be attributed to the fact that he lacks appropriate role models in the family home.

Table 3.3 Peer group pressure

| Category 3   | Peer pressure  | n = 4 |
|--------------|----------------|-------|
| Sub-category | Image building | 3     |
|              | Admiration     | 2     |
|              | Friendships    | 2     |
|              | Drugs          | 2     |

Image building in the life-world of the pupils interviewed centred on them trying to gain the attention of their peers through acts of daring and defiance. The notion that one was acceptable if one was associated with peers who were regarded as tough, also emerged from some of the interviews. These associations were, however, problematic because many of their role models manifested socially unacceptable behaviour.

(S1): "If you were a 'heavy', you could make more impression."

(S2): "... all the main 'ou's' have like a 'slapgat' houding."



(S4): "I wanted to be main."

Admiration may be coupled with the aspect of image building and was manifested in the interviews in the sense that some of the pupils looked up to certain individuals who were known to be toughs, and because of their association with these individuals, they were themselves also held in awe by some of their peers. This almost obsessive need to be accepted and recognised may be related to the fact that their circumstances actually make them feel inferior to others.

(S1): "'Cause then I was regarded as a hero in the school."

(S2): "We always looked up to him (because he was tough), and we wanted to be like him."

Friendships in the life-world of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy played a significant role in the sense that they seemed to select those friends who were not necessarily keen on the idea of attending school. The reason for this seemed to be that they could identify with these peers and were accepted by them.

(S1): "All our lives, it was us three (buddies) together."

(S3): "Ek wil saam met my vriende wees."

Drugs played a role in the lives of those pupils who were exposed to them, and this affected their attitude towards school negatively. Coupled to the aspect of indifference, it also contributed to a careless attitude. It seemed that those pupils who were involved with drugs, had either done so under pressure from the peer group, or the fact that the effect of the drugs offered them a temporary escape from reality.

(S1): "...he took acid and smoked dagga and that, and so I used to join in."

(S2): "... the others were smoking 'zol', and they tuned me do you want a trek, and I just said yes, why not."

The first three categories formed part of the ecological part-system within which each human being functions. The categories discussed henceforth form part of the intrapsychic part-system within which man functions.

#### 3.4.4 Category 4: Emotional considerations

The life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is characterised by emotional upheaval (Table 3.4). The emotional turmoil is manifested in various types of behaviour, such as fighting and defiance, which contribute to the pupil's demonstration of truancy. These pupils are more prone to emotional outbursts than those pupils who are associated with a stable upbringing, and consequently they find it difficult to exercise control over their emotions. When they encounter something which is not to their liking, they often react in an inappropriate and socially unacceptable manner.

Table 3.4 Emotional considerations

| Category 4   | Emotional considerations | n = 4 |
|--------------|--------------------------|-------|
| Sub-category | Acting out               | 4     |
|              | Defiance                 | 4     |
|              | Sorrow                   | 4     |
|              | Fighting                 | 3     |
|              | Anger/rage               | 3     |
|              | Boredom                  | 3     |
|              | Passivity                | 2     |
|              | Guilt                    | 2     |

Acting-out seemed to be one of the only ways that these pupils could express the frustration they were experiencing. This was manifested mostly in the classroom in the form of naughtiness, rebelliousness and aggression.

(S1): "I became very naughty in class."

(S2): "I became even more rebellious."

- (S3): "Ek het meer probleme gegee vir die onderwysers."  
 (S4): "I was in Nasereth House, and then I broke things there."

Defiance was manifested as an outright challenge to the authority figures, and included deliberate breaking of school rules and refusing to do any work. This seemed to stem from an attempt to impress their peers, and a determination to show those who were in authority that they weren't capable of controlling them. It is also possible that the defiance demonstrated by these pupils could have been the manifestation of a power struggle.

- (S1): "I had a competition with my friend to see who could miss the most days at school."  
 (S2): "We went out of our way to go against the school rules."  
 (S3): "Hardloop oor die banke of lag vir die onderwyserses."  
 (S4): "I never did any work in her (the teacher's) class".

Sorrow experienced by these pupils, even when they were very young, was vividly remembered by them, and it was clear that there were incidents in their life-worlds which hurt them deeply. In most instances the hurt that they felt was related to their being let down by someone close to them, which probably had a negative impact on their faith in adults especially.

- (S1): "I was still small, but I could feel the hurt."  
 (S2): "I was waiting for them (my parents) to come, and they didn't come, and I was crying."  
 (S3): "Toe (my ma begin huil het) het ek sommer hartseer geword."  
 (S4): "I wasn't happy."

Fighting manifested in the families of these pupil's either between parents themselves, or between siblings, and also between

siblings and their parents. There were also incidents of fighting with peers. It was clear that these pupils lacked the skill to handle interpersonal conflicts. This may be attributed to the fact that the example that they witnessed in their family homes was characterised by malisciousness, rather than by rational reasoning and mutual respect for each others feelings.

(S1): "I'm thinking I'm not taking his (a fellow pupil) nonsense, so we got into a fight."

(S2): "I started shouting and hitting her (my sister)."

(S3): "Sy (my suster)en my ma het elke keer baklei."

Anger and rage resulted from some of the pupils not being able to do anything about situations beyond their control, which resulted in them getting involved in arguments, and even desiring to see the objects of their anger seriously injured, or even killed. It seemed that they experienced feelings of helplessness and sometimes felt that they were trapped in a situation from which they believed that they could not escape.

(S1): "It (the teacher's reaction) made me feel angry and upset."

(S2): "I started out just arguing (with my step-father) and then I got so aggravated."

(S3): "Toe dink ek dit sal lekker wees om net my stiefma dood te kan sien."

Boredom experienced by these pupils seemed to be symptomatic of a general depressive state of mind, which manifested in the interview situation in the form of some of the pupils' displaying a dull and tedious disposition. It appeared that this stemmed mostly from the fact that they simply weren't interested in what was going on in the school.

(S1): "I write 10 words (in my classwork book) and then I get bored."

(S2): "I started getting bored (in the classroom)."

(S3): "Dan word ons moeg (om te teken), en dan moet ons weer

iets anders doen."

Passivity seemed to manifest in the sense that some of the pupils lacked the desire or ability to become actively involved in productive activities. Their passivity could possibly be attributed to the fact that these pupils felt that nothing that they could do would make any difference, and also that they could not handle being criticised. Consequently the self-confidence to risk was lacking.

(S2): "I was just not motivated at all, I didn't feel like working."

(S3): "Dan sit ek daar (in die klas) en doen niks."

Guilt, accompanied by regret, and the feeling that they were responsible for doing something or someone wrong manifested in the sense that some of these pupils felt that they wished that they could change the past. Clearly these pupils do have a conscience, and it would appear that the feelings and opinions of certain people do matter to them.

(S1): "I wish that I could rather get that money and give it back to her."

(S2): "When she noticed it (that drink was missing from the cabinet), I actually felt quite guilty."

#### 3.4.5 Category 5: Feelings of insecurity

The life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy, is characterised by many insecurities. These insecurities manifest in the pupil often avoiding responsibilities, experiencing alienation, and withdrawing from uncomfortable situations. Again this manifestation may be traced to the family home where the children were not taught the value of hard work as well as the importance of mutual love, respect and self-worth.

Table 3.5 Feelings of insecurity

| Category 5   | Feelings of insecurity | n = 4 |
|--------------|------------------------|-------|
| Sub-category | Avoidance              | 4     |
|              | Alienation/Humiliation | 3     |
|              | Containment            | 3     |
|              | Withdrawal             | 2     |
|              | Anxiety                | 2     |
|              | Unsure feelings        | 2     |

Avoidance manifested in the lives of the subjects who were interviewed mainly as a means of getting away or escaping situations that they could not face, or did not like, such as school. They simply lacked the skill and self-confidence to confront any obstacles in a meaningful and objective way.

- (S1): "So I didn't want to go to school, because of the teacher."
- (S2): "I would just ignore it (if I didn't like it)."
- (S3): "Toe slaap ek in die park vir die dag."
- (s4): "I don't know, I just didn't like him (my step-father), so I stopped speaking to him."

Alienation and humiliation manifested in the sense that some of the pupils felt out of place in their surroundings at school. Certain incidents at school also made them feel embarrassed and ashamed, thus contributing to their negative attitude towards school. They simply felt that they did not fit in certain situations and were riddled with complexes of inadequacy.

- (S1): "She (the teacher) slapped one of the girls, it made us boys feel embarrassed."
- (S3): "Dit (die nuwe skool) was nie vir my lekker nie, want ek het niemand geken nie."
- (S4): "Well, I actually felt out, so I started to slip school."

**Containment** refers to the expression of the desire or need to feel safe and secure. It was apparent from the interviews that the more strict and more structured the institution was, the more secure these pupils felt. They longed for someone to take care of them and to guide them through their difficulties with love, understanding and authority.

- (S1): "The teachers check every five minutes in my class so make sure that you don't bunk classes)."
- (S2): "It was a small community, and every one knew each other, and that's what made it nice."
- (S3): "Ek het in die grade saal geslaap en die matrone het my goed behandel (ek was gelukkig)."

**Withdrawal** may also be coupled to avoidance and was manifested in some pupils trying to get away from situations that they did not feel comfortable with. This may be attributed to the fact that they lacked the coping mechanisms and skills to handle conflict situations and problems that they were confronted with.

- (S2): "I never had conversations with my mother, the longest I spoke with her was 3 minutes."
- (S3) "Toe het ek by haar ( my stiefma) weggebly, en elke keer as sy met my praat, dan ignoreer ek haar."

**Anxiety** may be coupled with emotional considerations, and was manifested in some of the pupils expressing fear and uncertainty about certain situations. They were clearly not comfortable with the idea of being separated from their biological parents, while their aimlessness and lack of direction implied that they had no faith in the future.

- (S1): "...every day you go to school, and you are like scared."
- (S2): "I think I was sad, and I was kind of scared (when my parents seperated)."

Feelings of unsureness forms part of the manifestation of anxiety in the sense that some of the subjects experienced difficulty in making up their minds regarding situations and relationships.

(S1): "So they weren't like exactly friends."

(S2): "Dit(my pa se houding ) was vreemd vir my, en ek het nie geweet wat gaan aan nie."

### 3.4.6 Category 6: Lack of discipline

The life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is often characterised by a lack of discipline, which in many cases leads to delinquent behaviour. The reasons for this indiscipline appear to stem from the family home, where the entire family structure is often problematic. Themes that were manifested by the pupils relating to lack of discipline included ambivalence, indifference, diversion and running away.

Table 3.6 Lack of discipline

| Category 6   | Lack of discipline | n = 4 |
|--------------|--------------------|-------|
| Sub-category | Ambivalence        | 4     |
|              | Indifference       | 4     |
|              | Diversion          | 3     |
|              | Running away       | 2     |

Ambivalence regarding emotions and values was manifested in the life-worlds of some of the pupils. They often reported experiencing both of two contrary feelings, which could possibly be attributed to the confusion created by their circumstances. Arguments, conflict and constant disruption seemed to have a bewildering effect on these pupils.

(S1): "I was happy, but I wasn't happy."

(S2): "I was actually quite exited to go, but on the other hand, I wanted to stay."

(S3): "Ek was bly dat ek by my pa was, maar ek was



hartseer omdat ek van my ma moes weggaan."

(S4): "Yah, in a way yes, in a way not."

Indifference was manifested by many of the pupils who communicated a "couldn't care less" attitude, based on their lack of interest in most activities that would require some form of discipline. They could apparently not see any value in attending school, and also lacked the motivation to attend school, complete homework tasks and to strive towards achievement. This could possibly be attributed to the fact that their lives were in such turmoil emotionally, that they had no faith in the future, nor in the goodwill of anyone.

(S1): "If it's not too late, and I feel like going to school, then I go, else I just stay."

(S2): "It ( my schoolwork) was never done, I didn't even have books most of the time."

(S3): "My punte was sleg, maar ek was nie baie gepla nie."

(S4): "I couldn't see why I should do schoolwork anymore."

Diversion manifested in the lives of some of the pupils by virtue of the fact that they were easily distracted, especially by activities that would keep them out of school. Again the lack of self-discipline and disregard for the value of attending school seemed to result in them succumbing to the slightest temptation to satisfy their own interests at the expense of more important priorities.

(S1): "Me, I just always want to hang with the 'ou's', and go out."

S2): "I used to look out the bus window on the way to school, and if the waves was good, I just didn't go to school."

(S4): "Well, there were so many other things to do."

Running away may be coupled to school dislike and inadequate parenting, but there is no doubt that lack of discipline was also

a major factor. The family home did not provide the domestic stability that is so important in the lives of children, as it was characterised by constant conflict, squabbling, and disruption. Added to this, was an inability to consider the possible consequences of running away, and an insistence on the satisfaction of their own interests to the detriment of their schoolwork.

(S2): "...then I ran away from home, I lived with my friends for a week."

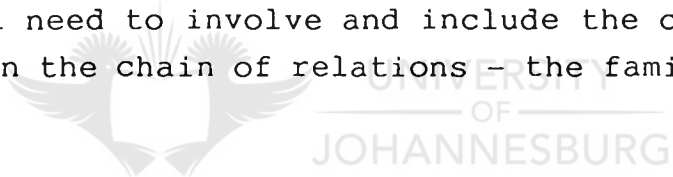
(S3): "Toe het ek die idee gekry, kom ons gaan Durban toe."

### 3.5 OBSERVATIONS FROM THE FIELDWORK

The educational environment in which the pupils who formed part of the research were resident and which includes tuition and hostel facilities was experienced by the researcher as therapeutically appropriate. The school and hostel are housed on the same campus which is surrounded by trees and well kept gardens, with the offices of the two resident psychologists separate from the administration block. The infrastructure appeared to be well maintained as were the sportsfields. First discussions with the resident psychologists revealed that they were experiencing uncertainty regarding the future of the institution in anticipation of changes to the education policy. The psychologists explained that the programme at the school for the pupils was well planned and organised, and so designed as to provide minimal opportunity for transgression. The programme includes tuition, guidance, therapy sessions, sport and entertainment. The impression which the researcher gained during the course of the interviews was that while these pupils were on the campus, they felt contained and secure. They also participated in the research quite willingly and generally shared their life-world experiences spontaneously. As a "control" measure for the "endangered" truant, the institution as a whole seemed to be very suitable.

### 3.6 CONCLUSION

It is evident from the results of this research that regular school attendance depends on the support of a three-way link between the family, the school and society. The stability of this link holds implications for matters which relate to learning, behaviour and attendance. If either or all of these links are inadequate, or if the link is seen to break down, then "trouble" arises. Such a breakdown provides important clues on how problematic relations and reactions involving parents, children and schools have a major impact on the emotions, discipline and security of the child. There can be no doubt that the demonstration of truancy is not an isolated problem or phenomenon, but that it is part of a much wider systemic disorder. In the light of this fact, the solution to the problem of truancy will need to involve and include the co-operation of all the links in the chain of relations – the family, the school and society.



### 3.7 SUMMARY

To sum up, the following themes were identified: domestic circumstances; problems related to school; peer group pressure; emotional considerations; feelings of insecurity; and lack of discipline. These themes are used to identify correlations and exceptions in the literature study, which is covered in chapter 4.

In the following chapter, the categories and sub-categories of the present empirical research are compared to relevant literature.

## CHAPTER 4

## LITERATURE CONTROL OF THE OBTAINED EMPIRICAL RESEARCH FINDINGS

## 4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the empirical research results are discussed and interpreted in accordance with identified categories (subsequently referred to as themes), which include domestic circumstances, problems related to school, the influence of peer pressure, emotional considerations, feelings of insecurity and lack of discipline. In this chapter, the empirical research results are compared to relevant literature in order to identify existing concurrences, as well as possible differences or exceptions. In doing so, the themes are placed within their paradigmatic systems.

According to Jordaan and Jordaan (1989:41-42), man functions within four part-systems:

- \* The ecological part-system, which emphasizes the inter-dependent relationships between living organisms, thus including interpersonal and group relationships.
- \* The intrapsychic part-system, which includes the perceptual (to do with the senses), the emotional (to do with feelings), the dispositional (to do with the manner of behaviour), and the self (self-concept).
- \* The physical part-system, that is the biological phenomena, which include the physical health of a person.
- \* The meta-physical part-system, that is aspects pertaining to nature.

The physical and meta-physical part-systems are, however, not covered in any further detail in this chapter, by virtue of the fact that these factors did not emerge as a contributory influence in the demonstration of truancy in the empirical research or in the literature study. The focus is therefore on

the role of the ecological and intrapsychic part-systems.

Where sub-themes from the empirical research could not be correlated with relevant literature, those sub-themes are included at the end of the literature comparison relating to the relevant main and sub-themes. This is indicated by means of an asterisk as a unique contribution from the empirical research.

Where sub-themes identified in the literature control could not be correlated with sub-themes from the empirical research, those sub-themes are indicated by means of a double asterisk where applicable.

#### 4.2 THE ECOLOGICAL PART-SYSTEM

The categories and themes that form part of the ecological part-system and that appear to contribute towards truancy, include domestic circumstances, factors within the school, and peer group pressure. The behaviour and experiences of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy, that are reflected in these themes, are elicited, maintained and changed within the context of his living environment (paragraph 1.4.1). This includes his interpersonal and group relationships.

##### 4.2.1 . Domestic circumstances

Galloway (1986:23), considers family stress as an important incentive not to attend school. O'Keefe (1994:14) expressed the view that children often play truant because typically by reason of their home backgrounds, they are ill equipped to deal with the normal pressures of schooling. In the home environment, the family structure, the nature of interpersonal relationships and the general domestic climate, all contribute towards the demonstration of truancy by the pupil. If the family does not provide the child with a safe and secure haven, where he can receive love, warmth, acceptance, authority and other virtues,

his entire future life is affected. The absence or neglect of these basic needs creates an unhealthy climate for the child's move into the formal school situation. The close association that intersects the family and school, makes it possible for the child to translate the problems which he encounters in his family into problems at school (Gleeson, 1992:453).

The present empirical research revealed that the domestic life of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy is characterised by factors such as marital conflict, sibling conflict, divorce, remarriage, ineffectual parenting and bad stepparents (see chapter 3).

#### 4.2.1.1 Marital conflict

Barkley (1987:68), found that stressful events related to the parents' marital relationship, can contribute to the likelihood of non-compliant and inappropriate behaviour in their children, of which truancy may be an example (see also Sommer, 1985:412). A family home climate characterised by disharmony is certainly not an ideal environment for one who needs to study, practice cognition, and grow towards maturity. According to Pretorius (1981:141), the tension, hate, distrust and arguments that accompany marital disharmony and marital conflict, create a disruptive atmosphere in the family, which can make the child feel anxious, insecure and confused. This type of home atmosphere often results in the child playing truant and eventually dropping out of school altogether, simply to get away from the unbearable domestic situation.

This corresponds with the empirical research which also exposed marital conflict as creating a negative effect on the truant's ability to cope with interpersonal relationship problems, and on his faith in the goodwill of others.

#### 4.2.1.2 Divorce

Dornbusch (1985:326-341), reported that divorce evidently leads to the break-up of the family unit, which then in turn may lead to social welfare problems( one of which is often truancy). According to Garbers (1980:32), there is a direct correlation between parents' divorce and their children dropping out of school (which is often preceded by truancy). Reid (1986:5), in fact, links truancy directly to the problem of overcoming marital disharmony such as parental divorce or separation. Divorce is usually accompanied by emotional upheaval in the family, as well as feelings of rejection, disruption and turmoil, all of which may contribute to the pupil's deliberate absence from school.

The present empirical research suggests that parents' divorce and the break-up of marriages seriously effected the stability and the interpersonal relationships of those pupils identified as demonstrating truancy.

#### 4.2.1.3 Remarriage, ineffectual parenting, and bad stepparentage.

Remarriage, ineffectual parenting and bad stepparentage are dealt with simultaneously as sub-themes in this research by virtue of the fact that they appear to follow on from each other.

According to Stott (1980:308), stepparentage, which often results from divorce and remarriage, is one of a number of social factors which predispose to delinquency (which often includes the demonstration of truancy). In a family structure with only one true (biological) parent within the family structure, there is always a greater chance of affectional inadequacy, which often implies ineffectual parenting. Authors like Sommers (1985:412) and Reid (Wardhaugh, 1990:774), also state that the truant is often the product of a neglectful uncaring home.

The present empirical research revealed that the remarriage of

their parents had an unsettling effect on the truants' lives by virtue of the "intrusion" of a new, and mostly strange marriage partner in their family set-up. Ineffectual parenting and bad stepparentage, which were manifested through physical abuse, accusations and continuous criticism, also emerged from the present empirical research as part of the life-world of pupils who deliberately absented themselves from school.

#### 4.2.1.4 Sibling conflict

According to Pretorius (1981:140), sibling conflict does not only have a disruptive influence on the family, but it is also detrimental to the educational activities within the family. Inevitably, this manifestation would also have an impact on the child's attitude towards school and on his school attendance, and consequently could contribute to the pupil's demonstration of truancy.

Those pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy who formed part of the empirical research and who had siblings indicated that their sibling relationships were volatile and full of conflict.

#### 4.2.2 Problems related to the school

According to Hersov and Berg (1980:89), theoretical and empirical sociological knowledge suggests that the school system itself may be an important influence in generating truancy, and that there may be identifiable factors within schools that are closely associated with the development of truancy behaviour amongst their school children. This view was shared by O'Keefe (1994:17), who also found that there is a body of theoretical and empirical literature which looks at the school itself as a cause of truancy. Ziesemen (1984:169), speaks of the lack of social bonding of the truant pupil to his school.

The present empirical research reveals that the problems that



pupils who are identified as demonstrating truancy have with the school, relate to teacher relationships, school dislike, frequent changing of schools, punishment, poor scholastic performance and tokenism.

#### 4.2.2.1 Teacher relationships

Literature based on research regarding the causes of truancy suggest that teacher/pupil relationships form a major component in influencing the demonstration of truancy by pupils. According to O'Keefe (1994:51-52), 27 per cent of the pupils identified as demonstrating truancy and who formed part of the research to which he refers, cited teacher unpleasantness and antipathy towards certain pupils as playing a role in their demonstration of truancy. Research findings reported in Hersov and Berg (1980:155), also suggest that fear of a teacher is a contributory factor in a pupils' deliberate absence from school.

The present empirical research also suggests that negative encounters with teachers played a role in the life-world of pupils who deliberately absent themselves from school.

#### 4.2.2.2 Changing schools

Hersov (King, Ollendick and Tonge, 1995:16), reported that the most common precipitating factor in school refusal, which is basically a manifestation of truancy, was a change to another school. This view is supported by researchers such as Galloway (1986:23), and Normand and Donnelly (1989:3), who state that one of the characteristics of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy is frequent changing of schools. Changing schools usually involves not only a change of environment, but also the disruption of established friendships.

The present empirical research found that changing schools often played a negative role in the life-world of those pupils identified as demonstrating truancy.

#### 4.2.2.3 School dislike and poor scholastic performance

According to Normand and Donnelly (1989:3), one of the main characteristics of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy is poor academic performance. Hersov and Berg (1980:17), also found that a pupil's dislike of school was often associated with low school attainment, which is in effect poor scholastic performance. Research conducted by O'Keefe (1994:21) on the causes of truancy stated that the greater majority of pupils identified as demonstrating truancy claimed to dislike specific lessons, suggesting that discontent with the lesson component of school life is a precipitating factor in a pupil's decision to play truant.

The present empirical research revealed that those pupils identified as demonstrating truancy all manifested poor scholastic performance and a major dislike of school.

#### 4.2.2.4 Punishment

Gleeson (1992:456), found that there is no strong evidence that any of the punishment models implemented by schools to restrict the practice of truancy work effectively. He added that, on the contrary, "it is more likely to amplify deviance". Hallahan and Kauffman (1986:160), state that punishment meted out by the school on the misbehaving child often reinforces the misbehaviour. Barth (1984:156), actually found that attendance is higher in classes where teachers avoid corporal punishment.

According to the present empirical research findings, the punishment experienced by those pupils identified as demonstrating truancy at the hands of teaching staff was also ineffective, and even rather contributed towards their deliberate absence from school.

\* A characteristic of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy that emerged from the present empirical research

(see chapter 3), but which was not found in the literature, was the manifestation of tokenism by these pupils. They gave the impression that they were "just going through the motions", and that they were doing the absolute minimum in school, simply as a tokenistic gesture for their parents and teachers. This manifestation amounts to what is commonly known as "bluffing".

#### 4.2.3 Peer group pressure

The pupil who associates with undesirable elements in the friendships that he forms, often manifests a tendency to display irresponsibility, rebelliousness, and negativity regarding his school and teachers (Pretorius, 1981:201-202). This can understandably cause him to neglect his schoolwork; a behavioural pattern which is characteristic of the pupil demonstrating truancy. According to Kapp (1990:117), the child with problem behaviour (which often includes truancy), is in danger of becoming trapped in a spiral of negative interactions with both teachers and peers alike.

The present empirical research revealed that some of the pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy placed great importance on being acknowledged by their male and female peers. In this respect, aspects such as image, admiration, drug abuse and friendships all played a role in their deliberate absence from school (see chapter 3).

##### 4.2.3.1 Image

Trojanowicz (1978:109), in discussing the phenomenon of delinquency (which includes truancy), suggests that image is an important aspect in the life of delinquent children, who manifest a basic need to develop a certain image, which will make them acceptable to the group. According to Kapp (1990:118), the acquisition of status in the peer group is often a contributory factor to the manifestation of misbehaviour. Berg (1985:325)

refers to the "masquerade syndrome" of truants.

The idea of having an image as someone who is tough and daring was exposed by the present empirical research as part of the life-world of some of the pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy. This was so, by virtue of the fact that they wanted to be accepted by their peers.

#### 4.2.3.2 Friendships

According to Tyerman(1968:69), the likelihood of a pupil becoming a truant is increased when such a pupil's friends at school have little respect for education. This statement speaks for itself regarding the influence of friendships on truant behaviour.

The present empirical research also revealed that the pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy in fact often selected friends who were themselves not too keen on the idea of attending school.

#### 4.2.3.3 Drug abuse

According to Trojanowicz (1978:113), reasons for drug abuse amongst juvenile delinquents (who also often deliberately absent themselves from school), include a great deal of peer pressure. Using drugs is often considered to be the "in" thing to do in these circles. Drug abuse may provide the entry ticket into an "in group" or it may be a way of affirming the delinquents' (and often truants') independence by defying authority and convention. Kapp (1990:119) also associates drug abuse with the demonstration of truancy with reference to juvenile delinquency. Pritchard, Cotton and Cox (1992:1), found that drug abuse was three times as high among truants than among their non truanting peers.

The present empirical research also suggested that some pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy were in fact abusing drugs. The reasons for their drug abuse seemed to stem mainly

from peer group pressure.

- \* The sub-theme of admiration that emerged as a factor in the present empirical research (see chapter 3 ) was not found in the literature consulted. Some of the pupils in the present investigation looked up to individuals who were known to be toughs, and because they mirrored the tough's behaviour, they knew that they themselves were also held in awe by their peers. School attendance was not a priority in the minds of these (tough) pupils.

#### 4.3 THE INTRAPSYCHIC PART-SYSTEM

The intrapsychic part-system in which man functions is made up of the perceptual, cognitive, emotive, dispositional and self subsystems. The themes which were identified by the present empirical research that are included in this part-system are emotional considerations, feelings of insecurity, and lack of discipline.

##### 4.3.1 Emotional considerations

Research conducted by Griesel (1992:155), indicates that there is a significant correlation between a child's perception of himself being emotionally abused by his parents, and his ability to form meaningful personal, domestic, social and formal relationships. Other emotional areas of such a person's life are also affected, including his self-confidence, his self-control, his self-worth and his moral convictions. These factors are all likely to have a major impact on such a pupil's attitude towards school and school attendance.

The emotional considerations that form part of the life-world of pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy in the present empirical research, include acting out, defiance, sorrow, fighting, anger/rage, boredom, passivity and guilt.

#### 4.3.1.1 Acting out, defiance, fighting, anger and rage

Defiance, fighting, anger and rage in this discussion are coupled by virtue of the fact that these manifestations are all forms of acting out behaviour.

One of the most important conditions related to maladjustment (which may relate to the demonstration of truancy), include the emotional characteristics of excessive extraversion (Williams, 1974:136). Excessive extraversion could imply behaviour which may well qualify as "acting out". According to Thompson and Rudolph (1992:484), fighting can be a means of covering up emotional problems.

The present empirical research suggests that pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy acted out their emotional frustrations through misbehaviour in the classroom and elsewhere. Defiance manifested in the form of a deliberate breaking of school rules, whilst fighting, anger and rage were also manifested and were directed at adults, siblings and peers alike.

#### 4.3.1.2 Sorrow

The emotionality of an individual describes his general emotional reactions to events within the environment. In the case of the child, who manifests excessive misbehaviour (which includes truancy), this emotionality is often characterised by sorrow. Such children are usually hard to console when upset, and they emote very easily and often to excess (Barkley, 1987:64).

According to the present empirical research, sorrow did manifest in the lives of pupils who deliberately absented themselves from school in the sense that some of them revealed that they were deeply hurt through being let down by someone close to them.

#### 4.3.1.3 Boredom

Boredom is also linked to behavioural and attitudinal expressions and has been shown to relate often to truancy and aggressiveness in school. Pupils who report experiencing boredom, often manifest hostility towards school and are quite likely to express themselves as being "fed up with teachers telling you what to do" (Hersov & Berg, 1980:17-18). Galloway (1986:23) also considers boredom as a most powerful disincentive to regular school attendance.

Observations of their dull and tedious disposition during the interviews which formed part of the present empirical research suggest that some of the pupils who deliberately absented themselves from school might well be bored at school. Some of them even stated quite categorically that they are bored with school. This boredom probably plays a role in their demonstration of truancy.

#### 4.3.1.4 Guilt

The potential 'dropout' (of which the truant is a candidate), often manifests feelings of poor self-worth, a poor sense of morals, low ego strength and emotional immaturity. He also tends to be suspicious, and exhibits feelings of guilt, tension and frustration (Garbers, 1980:40). All these factors would influence the pupil's attitude towards school attendance.

The present empirical research revealed that pupils who deliberately absent themselves from school are often plagued by feelings of guilt. This guilt is many a time related to a feeling of having done someone wrong.

\* Passivity manifested in some of the pupils involved in the present empirical research, but could not be correlated with the literature consulted. The passivity manifested by some of the pupils who deliberately absented themselves from

school as revealed by the research, seemed to stem from the fact that they felt that nothing that they could do would make any difference to their situations.

\*\* Manifestations that emerged from the literature control, but which could not be correlated with the present empirical research, included the fact that children who demonstrate truancy often show a tendency towards feelings of loneliness and miserability. This situation subsequently affects the child's sociability (which refers to the individual's general level of interest in others). These children also show difficulty in persevering with certain tasks (Herbert, 1987:232).

#### 4.3.2 Feelings of insecurity

Feelings of insecurity are coupled with emotional considerations in the present research by virtue of the fact that feelings of insecurity may be regarded as expressions of one's emotional state. These expressions of insecurity were manifested in the empirical research in behaviour in the form of avoidance, alienation/humiliation, containment, withdrawal, anxiety and unsure feelings.

##### 4.3.2.1 Avoidance

Persistent truancy was noted by Stott (1980:48), as the counterpoint of avoidance, which consists in the truant's inability to tolerate steady activity, and a hankering after a change of scene. The implications for the pupil who exhibits avoidance behaviour, would appear to be a negative attitude towards school, and probably staying away from school.

In the present empirical research, avoidance in those pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy manifested in the form of side-stepping those situations which they could not face, or simply did not like, such as school.



#### 4.3.2.2 Alienation

Truants nearly always experience feelings of alienation, rootlessness, hopelessness, and estrangement from their school, home, neighbourhood and society in general (Rumberger, 1983:940). The fact that these pupils often experience alienation from school holds implications for their attitude towards school attendance.

The present empirical research revealed that some of the pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy felt alienated by certain incidents, which in turn contributed to their negative attitude towards school.

#### 4.3.2.3 Withdrawal

According to Stott (1980:48), parents' inability to give stability of affection, often results in a chronic affectional insecurity in their child. An uncertainty of affection of this kind over a number of years has proved to be such an emotional strain upon a child, that he eventually is no longer confident in relying on his parents for affection, and that he often shows symptoms of emotional withdrawal. According to Kapp (1990:118), children with emotional and behaviour deviations (such as the demonstration of truancy), often manifest withdrawal, revealing a lack of social interaction skills.

The present empirical research revealed that some of the pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy manifested a tendency to withdraw emotionally from those persons and situations that they did not feel comfortable with.

#### 4.3.2.4 Anxiety and feelings of unsureness

According to Thompson and Rudolph (1992:523), anxiety may be related to fear of the unknown, such as going to new places (schools), or being placed in new situations (homes with

stepparents). Fear and anxiety (which includes feelings of unsureness) are often manifested by the potential "dropout", and his poor self-esteem is often undermined even further by the fact that he tackles and confronts tasks with the idea of failure, even before starting them. He also tends to exhibit an almost paranoid feeling of insecurity (Garbers, 1980:38-40). The same can possibly also be said for the pupil who demonstrates truancy, since truancy usually precedes dropping-out.

The subjects interviewed in the present empirical research also manifested fear, anxiety and unsureness in the sense that they weren't comfortable with the idea of being separated from their biological parents. They also exhibited feelings of anxiety regarding the future, which had harmful implications for their attitude towards school.

\* A sub-theme that was not found in the literature consulted, but that did emerge from the research, was the theme of containment. Containment refers to the expression of the desire or need to feel safe and secure. It was apparent from the interviews that these pupils felt that the stricter and more structured their environment was, the more secure they felt.

#### 4.3.3 Lack of discipline

Though contemporary rhetoric associates child-centredness with progressiveness in education, this only has meaning if parents and children accept their defined roles, duties and responsibilities, in acceding to received morals and wisdom, linked with expected levels of behaviour, discipline, and school attendance (Gleeson, 1992:458).

Those pupils identified as demonstrating truancy by the present empirical research revealed that lack of discipline played a role in their deliberate absence from school. These aspects included ambivalence, indifference, diversion, and running away (see

chapter 3).

#### 4.3.3.1 Ambivalence

According to O'Keefe (1994:49), there is a great deal of evidence of ambivalence on the part of a large minority of pupils who deliberately absent themselves from school. He added that schools also do not seem notably successful in getting pupils to internalise values (which includes their attitude towards school attendance). By implication, the pupils themselves lack the self-discipline to consistently value the importance of regular school attendance.

The present empirical research revealed that those pupils who were identified as demonstrating truancy also manifested ambivalence in the sense that they reported often experiencing both of two contrary feelings, especially regarding values, which inevitably influenced their attitude towards school.

#### 4.3.3.2 Indifference

According to Herbert (1987:231-232), some children truant simply to demonstrate their independence of, or resistance to adult authority. He adds that other children, again, truant because they have adopted their parents' "couldn't care less" attitude to education and authority, which in effect amounts to being indifferent about school and schooling. Kapp (1990:142-143), states that some children's interest in their schoolwork is so meagre that they do not want to pay attention, and their poor (indifferent) work attitude exacerbates their inner resistance (to school attendance).

Pupils who were engaged in the present empirical research, often also communicated a "couldn't care less" indifferent attitude regarding most activities that would require some form of discipline.

#### 4.3.3.3 Diversion

In citing reasons for truancing O'Keefe (1994:60) states that the lure of other activities, commonly known as "diversion", is evidently strong among truants, and that apathy (being "not bothered" with school) also seemed to affect some of these pupils' self-discipline.

The present empirical research also exposed a tendency among some of the pupils who deliberately absented themselves from school to be easily diverted by activities which would keep them out of school; mostly activities which were self-serving.

#### 4.3.3.4 Running away

Researchers such as Stott (1980:372-376), and Levine, Metzendorf and Van Boskirk (1984:93-106), suggest that juveniles who run away (and play truant), do so because of a deliterious emotional environment. He adds that discipline can only be effective when the emotional conditions for its acceptance are present; the lack of which is a reflection on the pupils' living environment.

According to the present empirical research some of those pupils who deliberately absented themselves from school, also manifested a tendency to run away, ignoring the possible consequences of such an action.

#### 4.4 SUMMARY

The literature study revealed that the ecological part-systems that played a role in the manifestation of truancy, included the categories of domestic circumstances, factors within the school, and peer pressure. The intrapsychic part-systems which influenced a pupil's deliberate absence from school, included the categories of emotional considerations, feelings of insecurity and lack of discipline. These part-systems and themes (categories) which they

include all played a role in eliciting and maintaining the type of behaviour which described the life-world of the pupil identified as demonstrating truancy. The part-systems and the themes (categories) form the basis for the setting up of guidelines for the educational psychologist in counseling pupils identified as demonstrating truancy. These guidelines are dealt with in chapter 5.



## CHAPTER 5

GUIDELINES FOR THE EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGIST IN COUNSELING  
PUPILS DEMONSTRATING TRUANCY

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Against the background of the empirical research results (chapter 3), and the literature control (chapter 4), this chapter offers guidelines for the educational psychologist in counseling truants. The themes on which these guidelines are based are: domestic circumstances, problems related to school, aspects surrounding discipline, peer group pressure, emotional considerations and the need for security.

## 5.2 GUIDELINES

These guidelines take into account all the elements (themes and sub-themes), of the ecological and intrapsychic part-systems as identified by the empirical research and the literature control as having an influence on the demonstration of truancy. The influence of these themes is reciprocal as is graphically illustrated in the accompanying flow-diagram (see figure 5.1).

## 5.2.1 Diagnosis

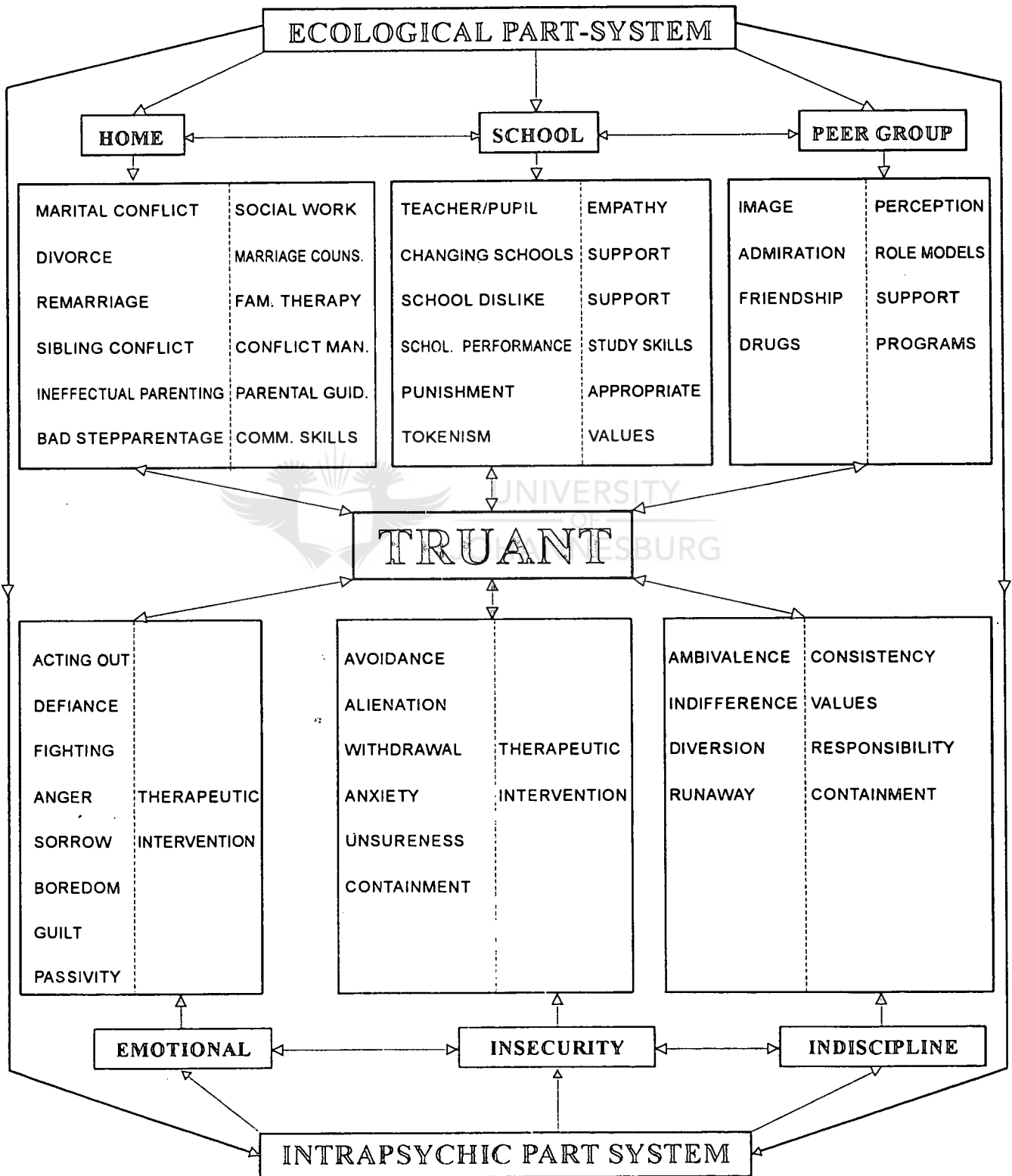
Wardhaugh (1990:741) suggests that in dealing with the problem of truancy, it is essential for an accurate diagnosis of the root causes to be made, adding that immediate help and support for the family may possibly prevent further deterioration in the conditions.

## 5.2.2 Intervention

The range of interventions possible are many and varied, but may be divided broadly into "care" functions which may be more effective in dealing with the fearful truant, and "control"

FIGURE 5.1 Counseling pupils demonstrating truancy

# GUIDELINES FOR COUNSELING TRUANTS



ABBREVIATIONS: COUNS = COUNSELING.  
 FAM. = FAMILY  
 MAN. = MANAGEMENT

GUID. = GUIDANCE  
 COMM. = COMMUNICATION  
 SCHOL. = SCHOLASTIC

functions which may be more applicable to the endangered truant (Wardhaugh, 1990:750-751).

- \* "Care" measures may be defined as measures which aim to bring about change in an individual or family through some type of provision for their material, emotional, psychological or social needs. The idea is that through treating the underlying causes of the problem and addressing the needs of truants, the actual problem will eventually resolve itself. The first duty of the educational psychologist in attempting to alleviate the problem of truancy is to implement "care" measures. However, if these measures are not effective enough in attempting to resolve the problem, "control" measures may be the only strategy of addressing the more serious cases.
  
- \* "Control" measures are those which attempt to effect change by means of the imposition of limits or controls on behaviour. In such a case, truancy is directly addressed through the strict implementation of rules and regulations in such a way that there is no or very little opportunity to trespass. Limits or controls may be imposed on the child's behaviour by means of: threatening legal action; escorting the child to school each day; calling the parents to the school; home visits; and warning the child on the school premises. A last resort as a control measure would be to place the child outside the family. Such a measure would involve the welfare authorities as well as the judicial system. If this measure is resorted to, four types of facilities are commonly relied on:
  - the home of relatives
  - a foster home
  - a private institution for the care of children
  - a place of safety or social welfare institution.

It goes without saying, that the quality of the new residential



environment is crucial to whether the child's problems will be alleviated or made worse by the placement.

The overall aim, however, of both types of measures is to assist the truants, and give them the necessary support to counteract truancy.

According to O'Keefe (1994:15), any attempt to stop pupils from playing truant, must be concerned with readjusting them, either in terms of the deficits formed in the home or of the inadequacies in the school environment. However, because the peer group also forms part of the ecological part-system within which the truant functions, this aspect should also be addressed. Therefore, themes which are treated in these guidelines include guidelines concerning domestic circumstances, factors within the school, and peer group pressure.

#### 5.2.2.1 Guidelines concerning domestic circumstances

Because most of the behavioural problems specific to children appear to grow out of pathogenic home and family circumstances, the truants' domestic situation will first need to be improved. Efforts to treat the truant will be futile if he does not feel safe and secure in the family home.

Marital conflict between the parents, as well as divorce and remarriage, should be treated through referring the parents to a reputable marriage counselor. It is, however, the duty of the educational psychologist to draw the attention of the parents to the effects of marital conflict on the child and the role that it plays in the pupil's demonstration of truancy. Conflict management strategies, as well as communication skills programmes may also be effectively utilised. The assistance of a social worker may also be called in to try and improve the domestic circumstances.

The problems of ineffectual parenting and bad stepparentage should also be addressed by the educational psychologist. This may be actualised through the presentation of a parental guidance programme such as "Systemic Training for Effective Parenting" (STEP)(Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989:8). Factors included in this programme that can be utilized to good effect are: understanding how children use emotions to involve parents; understanding children's behaviour and misbehaviour; decision making for parents and the "good" parent versus the "responsible" parent (Dinkmeyer & McKay, 1989:8).

Sibling conflict, as well as general domestic conflict and interpersonal relationship problems also need to be attended to by the educational psychologist. These problems may be treated through systemic family therapy, which concentrates on the resolution of interpersonal relationship problems, through conflict management and conflict resolution. This approach views any identified behavioural problem (such as truancy), as connected to a sequence of actions involving the parents and a sibling. For this treatment to be effective, it is usually essential for the parents as well as the truant and any siblings to participate in all the phases of the treatment programme (Coleman, Butcher & Carson, 1984:572-573). A programme that has met with success, and could be recommended, is titled "problem-solving therapy" by Jay Haley (Keeney and Ross, 1992:101). It is also known as 'The Mental Research Institute Strategy'(MRI). Briefly, MRI begins by prescribing distinctions that enable a therapist to identify: (1) the problem (in this case truancy); (2) the history of the attempted solutions of the truancy, and; (3) the frame of reference the truant and relevant others in his lifeworld (such as his parents), use to view and conceptualize the problem of truancy and the solutions thereof. Feedback involves constructing reframes, preferably with practical assignments, and then evaluating whether the contracted goal has been achieved. When the goal of therapy - stopping the truancy - is achieved, the therapy is concluded (Keeney & Ross, 1992:65-74).

#### 5.2.2.2 Guidelines concerning problems related to the school

The school was also identified in the present empirical research as playing a role in the life-world of truants, and therefore, the school will inevitably need to assist in the resolution of the problem of truancy.

Teacher-pupil relationships, school dislike, poor scholastic performance, punishment and changing schools, all need to be taken into account when considering the provision of guidelines for the school to follow in attempting to solve the problem of truancy. The educational psychologist could provide in-service training for teachers in the handling of pupils demonstrating truancy. The training programme could include aspects such as: the truant's need for security, empathy, acknowledgement, respect, and acceptance by the school. The school should also ensure that the truant is made to feel welcome (especially when he has changed schools), through providing appropriate support, and by involving him in school activities and extra-mural programmes, so that he may feel that he is part of the school and also making a worthy contribution to the school through his participation. A suitable study skills programme could be presented in order to address the problem of poor scholastic performance. The educational psychologist may also play a facilitating role in the truant's contact and acceptance by the peer group in the school.

The educational psychologist should help the school contribute to the minimizing of truancy, by ensuring the following:

- a) The needs of the truant, professionally perceived, should govern the school's provision.
- b) The staff of the school must appreciate and accommodate the fact that each truant in the school comes from a particular environment, involving multiple factors that have contributed, and are contributing to his development as an individual.

c) The work of the school must be conceived as a cooperative exercise with the following parties:

- \* the parents, to provide environmental stability, and an atmosphere which promotes a culture of learning
- \* the teachers, to involve themselves with the truant in terms of concern, support, and follow-up work
- \* disciplinary committees: mutual respect between pupils and staff must be developed, based on constant surveillance. Rules should be few, reasonable and enforceable, but flexible enough to meet individual needs where this is desirable. Punishment must be negotiable (in terms of different types), and any agreed upon means of punishment should "fit" the "crime"
- \* social workers, to monitor the domestic circumstances, and provide assistance if necessary
- \* educational psychologists, to identify underlying problems, and to provide or facilitate relevant treatment, and to provide training for both teachers and parents alike to enable them to understand the truant
- \* the judicial system, to enforce compulsory school attendance, and
- \* any other service or adults involved with truants.

The problem of poor scholastic performance may be addressed by the educational psychologist through the provision of a study habits and study skills programme. Such a programme should also include components that will improve the self-esteem and self-confidence of the pupil.

A method for managing pupils demonstrating truancy by the educational psychologist may include the following steps:

- \* creating a therapeutic contract that specifies, in behavioural terms, the problems underlying the truancy, and what the intended goal is
- \* assessing any attempted solutions by all involved, including

the truant himself, and

- \* using this information to design an intervention action to alleviate the problem of truancy.

### 5.2.2.3 Guidelines concerning peer group pressure

The sub-themes identified by the present research and the literature that were related to peer group pressure included the aspects of image, drug abuse, friendships and admiration.

Although the paradigmatic perspective of the educational psychologist suggests that the solution to related problems be treated within the specific system in which they function, treating the peer group as a component of the ecological part system, is not always possible. An area where the educational psychologist may however be able to make a contribution, would be in the establishment of a support group for the truant in co-operation with the teachers.

An alternative approach to treating this problem would be to provide individual therapy which should focus on the development of a future perspective. The therapy programme should focus on the role of: image building, which may involve changing the truants perceptions; admiration, which may include the provision of suitable role models; friendships, in terms of supportive associations; and suitable programmes on the dangers of substance abuse. The positive and negative roles that these factors play in the pupil's life should be made clear to him.

A suitable therapy programme which includes the development of a future perspective and also takes into account the influence of the peer group, would help "truants" create a better future. According to Egan (1994:24-39), such a programme may consist of the following stages and steps:

**Stage 1: The current scenario:** Reviewing problem situations and unused opportunities, as related to the truant.

Stage 2: The preferred scenario: Getting the truant to express what he wants from life and also to project into the future.

Stage 3: Determining how to get there: Assisting the truant in brainstorming strategies for action, choosing the best strategies and turning these strategies into a plan.

The final session is terminated once the truant has committed himself to the plan and arrangements have been put in place for ongoing evaluation of the programme.

The school may also contribute to the solution of the problem by providing a guidance programme which includes objective information and discussion on substance abuse and negative peer influences. In this respect, the educational psychologist may also assist in offering advice on how to get the pupils of a school to involve newly enrolled pupils.

Themes which are treated that are included in the intra-psychic part-system are emotional considerations, feelings of insecurity, and lack of discipline

#### 5.2.2.4 Guidelines concerning emotional considerations and feelings of insecurity

The programmes and measures ( care and control) already mentioned in treating the ecological components which influence the demonstration of truancy, may also be utilised in treating the intrapsychic components, which include the themes of emotional considerations and feelings of insecurity.

In some situations, the expression of guilt and anger in the form of acting out behaviour such as fighting and defiance, may be treated or reduced by discussing with the pupil the circumstances that surround their manifestation openly. In other situations, the pupil's urges need to be accepted without criticism, but with limits set on his actions. A limit should be so stated that it

tells the child clearly what constitutes unacceptable conduct, and what substitute will be acceptable. His urges can then be directed into acceptable symbolic outlets, such as sport (Ginott, 1965:96-99).

The sub-themes of sorrow, alienation and withdrawal may all be treated by the educational psychologist through therapeutic intervention. Boredom and passivity may be overcome through encouraging the inclusion of the truant in activities such as sport and culture. Avoidance may be overcome by the provision of projects which will require the truant to become involved with the other pupils. The sub-theme of containment, which refers to the need for strict security by the truant, may also be dealt with through the control measures referred to earlier.

#### 5.2.2.5 Guidelines concerning lack of discipline

Themes that emerged from the present research and the literature control that related to lack of discipline included:

- \* ambivalence, which may be treated with a programme designed to develop consistency in the truant's life
- \* indifference, which may be controlled through the development of a sound value system
- \* diversion, which may be solved through the development of responsibility, and
- \* running away, which may be solved through ensuring that the pupil feels contained within the family unit, the school, and society at large. The educational psychologist may be instrumental in providing parental and teacher guidance with the emphasis on "consistent discipline", the fulfilment of the "needs" of the truant, the development of "responsibility", and involvement of the truant in activities at home and at school.

These themes may also be treated by the educational psychologist through the use of the MRI strategy (see paragraph 5.2.1.1). However, the most effective strategy in helping pupils overcome

problems related to lack of discipline, is to teach them self-discipline.

According to Ginott (1965:96-97), self-discipline in children is best learned through modelling the self-discipline actualised by a parent or suitable adult. By modelling the effective parental discipline( or of suitable teachers), and identifying with these role models and the values which they personify, the child will attain inner standards for self-regulation. Briefly the discipline which the parents actualise with their children should include the following aspects:

- a) Allow children to speak out about what they feel, but limit and direct undesirable acts.
- b) Set limits which preserve the self-respect of the parent as well as of the child.
- c) The limits should be neither arbitrary nor capricious, but educational and character-building.

The educational psychologist should therefore provide parental guidance programmes as well as workshops for teachers, in which their importance as positive role models for the truant is addressed and encouraged.

### 5.3 PREVENTION

The educational psychologist also has a task with regard to preventing the possible demonstration of truancy. In collaboration with the school, he may arrange to present workshops for parents and teachers of young children, focussing on the symptoms to be aware of, and how these symptoms may be treated so as to prevent the possibility of them developing into a more serious problem such as truancy. All the relevant community structures such as the church, clinics, and social welfare organisations could also be called upon to assist the parents in their efforts to prevent the manifestation of truancy



in their children.

#### 5.4 CONCLUSION

There are numerous types of interventions for addressing behavioural problems such as truancy. The level of success that any intervention may achieve in alleviating maladjustments such as truancy, will however, depend on the willingness of the client to change, the co-operation of the family and the school, and on the competence of the educational psychologist as therapist.

#### 5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter considered guidelines that an educational psychologist might consider in order to alleviate the problem of truancy. The paradigm of this researcher is that all symptoms manifested by maladjusted pupils (which includes truants) are the result of a pathogenic system involving the family home specifically, as well as the school system and the peer group. The solution to the problem of truancy therefore requires firstly a "care" intervention that will involve all parties concerned where possible. Where "care" intervention is not successful, "control" intervention may be a last resort, which may involve placing the child out of the family home, whilst at the same time receiving therapy from the educational psychologist. The possible prevention of the manifestation of truancy and related problems may be addressed by presenting appropriate parental guidance workshops, focussing on awareness.

The final chapter concerns the conclusions, limitations and recommendations of the research.

## CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 6.1 CONCLUSIONS

The first objective of this study was to explore and describe the life-world of the pupils identified as demonstrating truancy. Six main categories were distinguished on the basis of the empirical research. The first three main categories include domestic circumstances, factors within the school, and peer group pressure, all of which are contained in the ecological part-system within which man functions. The second three main categories identified by the research include emotional considerations and feelings of insecurity, and lack of discipline, all of which are contained in the intrapsychic part-system within which man functions.

O'Keefe (1994:14), expressed the view that children often play truant because, typically by reason of their home backgrounds, they are ill equipped to deal with normal pressures of schooling. The present empirical research revealed that the domestic life of the pupils identified as demonstrating truancy, is characterised by factors such as marital conflict, divorce, remarriage, sibling conflict, ineffectual parenting, and bad stepparentage.

According to Hersov and Berg (1980:89), there may be identifiable factors within schools that are closely associated with the development of truanting behaviour amongst school children. The present empirical research revealed that these factors relate to teacher-pupil relationships, school dislike, frequent changing of schools, punishment, poor scholastic performance and tokenism.

Pretorius (1981:201-202), expresses the view that negative peer influences can create within the pupil an attitude of negativity regarding his school and teachers (which may lead to truancy).

The present empirical research revealed that truants often model themselves on individuals who are described as toughs, and select friends who are generally problematic and also sometimes involved in substance abuse.

According to Williams (1974:136), one of the most important conditions related to maladjustment (which often includes the demonstration of truancy), is the manifestation of various emotional characteristics. The present empirical research revealed that these emotional characteristics included acting out behaviour, defiance, fighting, anger and rage, as well as sorrow, boredom, guilt and passivity.

Stott (1980:48), expressed the view that the inability of some parents to give affective stability, often results in a chronic affectional insecurity in the child. The present empirical research revealed that the insecurities which characterised truants, often include avoidance, alienation, withdrawal, anxiety and feelings of unsureness.

According to Gleeson (1992:458), discipline is a prerequisite if children are to accept their defined roles and accede to received morals and wisdom, linked with expected levels of behaviour including school attendance. The present empirical research revealed that disciplinary factors manifested by the truants include the manifestation of ambivalence, indifference, diversion and running away.

The second objective of this study was to provide guidelines for educational psychologists in counselling truants. These guidelines were set up in accordance with the six main themes identified by the present empirical research (paragraph 5.2.2), because the paradigmatic perspective of the researcher is that no problem manifests in isolation, but is related to a pathogenic system which includes all the identified elements of the ecological and intrapsychic part-systems. The problem of truancy as such is viewed and treated as only the final manifestation of

a number of related problems, by virtue of the fact that the identified themes are regarded as interdependent.

The guidelines as discussed in chapter 5 were presented to and controlled by the two resident psychologists at the educational institution where the pupils involved in the research attend school, as well as two registered psychologists attached to an educational aid centre. All four these colleagues indicated that they regarded these guidelines as suitable and achievable.

## 6.2 LIMITATIONS

This research does have certain limitations, inter alia:

The race groups were not all included in this research due to the fact that the areas where some of the population groups were required to attend school were seriously effected by political unrest for a number of years in the recent past. Because in many cases proper records weren't kept and because absence from these schools was affected by the political climate, it was impossible to distinguish between pupils who deliberately absented themselves from school without a valid reason, and those who stayed away for valid reasons.

## 6.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are made with reference to the application possibilites as well as suggestions for further research.

Application possibilities in terms of further research include:

- \* Research regarding truancy amongst those race groups which were not included in this study.
- \* Research on how the peer group as a system can form part of the treatment programme.
- \* Research that is directed at the family system of the

truant.

- \* Research in which all the systems which form part of the life-world of the truant are investigated.
- \* Research which will include multiple data collection methods.

#### 6.4 FINAL WORD

It is clear that the problem of truancy has many facets. In general it seems that the prospect for the truant in terms of completing his schooling and finding suitable employment and leading a stable life are not too promising. The educational psychologist can make a significant contribution in assisting the truant to overcome the problems which prevent him from realizing his potential. However, because the problem of truancy is elicited and maintained within the ecological and intrapsychic part-systems in which the truant functions, all the components and elements contained in these systems will need to co-operate with each other if the problem of truancy is to be effectively resolved.

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ANNEXURE A

Letter of consent from the District Director.

GAUTENG DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
GAUTENG DEPARTEMENT VAN ONDERWYS

Tel No/Nr : (011)907 3730  
Fax No/Nr : (011)907 1215

Alberton/Heidelberg District Office  
Alberton/Heidelberg Distrik Kantoor  
Private Bag / Privaatsak  
X 8001  
ALBERTON  
1450

Reference :  
Verwysing :

Enquiries : Mr S V Koti  
Navrae :

25 April 1996

The Principal

[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]



UNIVERSITY  
OF  
JOHANNESBURG

CASE STUDIES : TRUANTS

Permission is hereby granted for Mr P A Smith to conduct case studies at the Hoërskool Emmasdal, as part of his M.ED. psychology studies.

MR S V KOTI  
DISTRICT DIRECTOR  
ALBERTON/HEIDELBERG

|                                   |
|-----------------------------------|
| GAUTENG DEPT. VAN ONDERWYS        |
| SUIDSTREEK<br>P/SAK - P/BAG X8001 |
| 24 APR 1996                       |
| ALBERTON 1450<br>SOUTH REGION     |
| GAUTENG DEPT. OF EDUCATION        |

## ANNEXURE B

### PROTOCOL FOR THE ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Dear colleague,

Please code the transcriptions of the interviews as follows:

1. Read the entire transcription, and employ "bracketting" (negating any preconceived ideas), and "intuition" (focussing on the topic being researched) throughout this first reading.
2. Read through the data a second time, and underline the words, sentences and themes which reflect the life-world of those pupils identified as demonstrating truancy. The life-world may be expressed in terms of thoughts, perceptions and feelings.

\* Thoughts:

Thoughts may be defined as an idea, judgement or opinion, which results from thinking

\* Perceptions:

Perception is the psychic product of observation. It is thus the subjective conscious experience and interpretation of information received from the internal and external environment

\* Feelings:

Feelings are the conscious experiences which form part of and emotion, such as feelings of joy, fear or anger.

The coder identifies the main categories in the data.

Sub-categories are identified under each main category by means of logical grouping together.

The researcher and the independent coder meet in order to discuss

and obtain the greatest possible degree of consensus regarding the results of the data analysis, and to refine the categories and sub-categories.

The relationships between the main and sub-categories are established.

Phillip Smith : M.Ed. (Psig) student  
July 1996



## ANNEXURE C

### EXTRACT FROM A PHENOMENOLOGICAL INTERVIEW

R Tell me about your life world?

S<sub>1</sub> When I was small, I went to a nursery school, okay, I didn't enjoy nursery school, because you know I was still small and the fact that I was without my mother all day. So then I started to get scared and that you know, of the idea of school, I was scared about it in the beginning.

R Being away from your mom made you scared?

S<sub>1</sub> Yah.

R This was now when you were at nursery school?

S<sub>1</sub> Yah. But it was OK, and class 1 and 2 and standard I were also OK, because we didn't do much work, it was more fun. And then I went to standard 2, and there was this wicked teacher, Mrs Walker, she was like hated by all the children, everyone hated her and she like abused us, like mistreated us children, you know at school. She was like, she was fired when it was like the last term in standard 2.

R She was fired?

S<sub>1</sub> Yah, she was fired because, she was ugly to one of the girls in my class, she would shout and swear, and her mother came and she complained. It was all big troubles, and then all the truths came out about the kids being abused at school.

R How did it make you feel?

S<sub>1</sub> "Hmm" I didn't feel it was nice, because she was like very unfair. Because the one time I won't ever forget. I was sitting, it was breaktime, it was just before break, and she made me stand outside the headmaster's office for the hole break, and all that you do there is just stand. You can't eat like if you stand there. So after break I went back to

class, and I was hungry ..., and at my desk I was eating my lunch now, and she came and she lifted up the desk and she hit me on my head, and I still had to go to the hospital because my nose was bleeding, and like it wasn't nice, no-one enjoyed it, because every day you go to school and you are like scared, so you didn't want to go to school because of the teacher.

R Hmmm.

S<sub>1</sub> So I didn't like school a lot, and I was misbehaving, so I was expelled but it was the teacher as well cause she was crazy.

R Tell me more about your feelings?

S<sub>1</sub> It made me feel angry and upset. Even sometimes at night I felt hurt, I was still small but I could feel the hurt .... Like when she slapped one of the girls, it made us boys feel embarrassed in front of the class. So I like, we felt angry and upset and also jealous, because she had her favourites. So we were also jealous because we felt left out.

R And how did these feelings effect your behaviour?

S<sub>1</sub> I became very naughty in class, throwing things at the teacher, fighting and bunking school.

R Then you were expelled in standard 2?

S<sub>1</sub> Yes, so I went to Burghill then and I had to repeat standard 2 because my marks weren't good enough. So I repeated standard 2, and standard 3 was in a boarding school, so you couldn't really bunk school and that. And I was misbehaving, and I was expelled in standard 3 as well. Then I went to Escort for standard 4 and 5. Then I started like bunking school and going to town or something. That was like, just to be a hero because that was like daring at the school and if you run to the shop, I mean buy a girl a chocolate I mean your heavy hey. If you were a heavy you could make more impression.

R **Tell me more about being a heavy?**

S<sub>1</sub> You know, to get a image in the school, so that like the people look up to you, and they think yee, you know, he's not scared to run to the shop, he's not scared of anything. Look at him, you know. .

R **Acknowledgment?**

S<sub>1</sub> Yah, like the little children look up to you. And in standard 5 I became a prefect, because I had children looking up to me.

R **How did you feel about being a prefect?**

S<sub>1</sub> I was happy but I wasn't happy, because I didn't want to become a school prefect. And I lost it at the second term of standard 5 ..... Because to be a school prefect you've always got to be at school watching other children, and I couldn't go to the shops or go duck down the banks and have a cigarette or something, because now I'm a prefect on duty, and if I'm not there or something and they here look for me there's trouble, and that. So I didn't like being a prefect. I was still a prefect, until July of the year of standard 5, and then I was expelled from the hostel and then I had to board by these people that just saw me as a kid. And I finished standard 5 while staying at their house, and I also bunked school a lot then. Cause then I was regarded as a hero in the school and school was just down the road, so I would walk to school and just go to my friends.

R **It seems to me that in virtually every class in every school, there were things that you didn't like.**

S<sub>1</sub> I hated the idea of school all together. I didn't like it, I didn't like school, I didn't enjoy it. I'm not very anxious, to me it's boring ..... interesting if the teacher makes it. I've had good teachers in the past, very good teachers, but school to me, I don't like. Twelve years of my life, every morning I have to wake up early to go to school when I could sleep late, go to the beach, do things that I want to do, but you have to go to school. That's why I never liked going there.



R You feel the teachers never made it any easier for you?

S<sub>1</sub> Yah.

R Generally speaking?

S<sub>1</sub> Some of them are nice. You had your nice teachers, and then there's always been lousy teachers. In every school I've been in, there's been at least 2 or 3 teachers that have to take sides or they have to be different to try to be funny. So they make it worse for you. They make .... those teachers they make you hate going to school.

R Hmmmm, and then you finished standard 5, and then you went to high school?

S<sub>1</sub> Yes. My mom took me out of boarding school, she took me back home to Durban and I went to George Campbell.

R That's a technical high school?

S<sub>1</sub> Yes. And then I started mixing with different people, in the beginning of standard 6. I started with the wrong type of people, I got in trouble and things like that. So there wasn't time for school. School was unliked. You wake up at 9 o'clock, you know, if it's not to late, and you wanna go to school, then I'll go. Else I'll just leave it.

R What else?

S<sub>1</sub> Hmmmm. I failed standard 6 and I did standard 6 again, and in 1994 about August I got pimpt at school, and I was in trouble for other things so I was expelled.

R You say you got pimpt at school?

S<sub>1</sub> Yah.

R What does that mean?

S<sub>1</sub> Oh. tattle tale.

R O, somebody told on you?

S<sub>1</sub> Yah.

R What did they tell on you?

S<sub>1</sub> I don't know. They said I had something in my bag. I threw a pen at this boy, his name was Rassie, and it stabbed him so he went to the headmaster, so the headmaster said that he had enough, because there were complaints that I was bullying the children as well. One of the boys, there was this one fat boy, and he always use to give me trouble. I never hurt him, I was pushing him. And one day, we had an argument and I pulled him and he went to the headmaster. Mr Killian, and said I strangled him with his tie, and obviously, because I was always in trouble, the headmaster believed him and so I got in trouble for that, and then I had hassles with another boy, I can't think of his name, his like a coloured, he looked like a coloured, very, very dark, and we went to computer, and I was in front of the line to go into the computer room, and he came and he pushed me out the line so I pushed him, and he just hit the wall backwards, He didn't fall or anything, and it was like a big thing and he went to the headmaster and said I was holding him over the edge. The more I tried to tell the headmaster I mean gee, the guy was like the same size as me, how could I hold him over the edge. He didn't really believe me, they believed him, because of my always being in trouble.

R You were always in trouble?

S<sub>1</sub> I always just got in trouble, they would name them and write them down in a book, everytime I was in trouble. So the headmaster said I must go.

R How was your attendance then?

S<sub>1</sub> My first year in George Campbell was 87 days absent. My second half of the year at George Campbell was 48 days absent.

**R** That was in your second year?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Yes, for just the half the year. I didn't like school, I had a competition with my friend to see who can miss the most days at school.

**R** Tell me about your friends?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Those were rubbish friends, like they're all gone now.

**R** Tell me about them, I would like to hear about them.

**S<sub>1</sub>** One of my friends, Leon, he is 22 now, he was 18 when I met him and he was in matric. So I met him at George Campbell, and he had a car and everything, and like he knew girls that I knew, and I knew girls that he knew, by co-incidence. So we got together and we became friends and that and we used to go down the coast at weekends and then he use to take acid and that, and things would get bad. And then, the last that I heard of him was when I came here, when I began year in standard 8, he became a Christian and he wrote some music and played in Christian bands and he released, I think 2 CD's, but now, now I don't know what happened, so .... And there is Justin, this other friend of mine, he's got to stay in the flat for 2 years cause his under house arrest, so his not allowed out of the building for 2 years he's got to stay inside there.

**R** He was also one of your friends?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Yah, from George Campbell. Yes.

**R** What caused him to be placed under house arrest?

**S<sub>1</sub>** He is a thief, yah, he was caught, I think for six house breaks and two car robberies, and ... So now he has to stay at home. Then I went to school with this Gevani, and we liked each other. We were in the same boarding school and we both liked the same things and that, so we were like, like 2 brothers. And my other friend Geordie, he stays on the 10th floor in our building, and there were 3 of us, we would like move together, cause he use to body surf, so we were like going out together and we'd go skateboarding together, riding, body boarding, surfing and skateboarding. All our lives, it was us 3 together.

**R** Hmmm, you mentioned that a lot of your friends were bad?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Yah.

**R** What do you think it is about them that was bad?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Hmmm. I think ..... drugs and everything. And like ..... it was like a bad influence. And then, Justin's other friends, and I, we got caught once breaking into a workshop and like they all blamed me and Geordie, they were blaming us, so those weren't friends, cause those were people we just met with Justin. So they weren't like exactly friends. They were bad.

**R** Did you have any other friends?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Hmm. I had like lots of friends, but I couldn't keep in touch with them, because of moving schools and that. And in standard 3 my best friend was called Jamy Jackson and his family liked me and we got on very well. In standard 4 and 5 there were friends Donald and Bradley. We were hostel prefects together, and we were all like, mainly from Durban. Donald was from South beach but he moved back to Johannesburg and Bradley I still see. I still see him. His alright. Then standard 6 the people that I knew, they were like friends but I mean, I can't call them friends because if I see them, I will beat them up you know, cause they influenced me.

**R** You feel like some of them, put you on the wrong path?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Yah, some of them did.

**R** How did you think they managed to put you on the wrong path?

**S<sub>1</sub>** Hmmm. Leon was on the wrong path. I was with him around the coast and that, and then he took acid and smoked dagga and that. And there was always girls with him I wouldn't just want to sit there, you know like some kid. So I used to join in.

R What else?

S<sub>1</sub> Hmmmm. I don't like to have lots and lots of friends. I just like to have a couple of friends, that I know are true friends, truly ..... they're true friends. In Durban I got lots of friends, I know a lot of people and people know me. But, I mean, if we meet each other somewhere at the beach, we'll spend the day at the beach together as friends, you know, but you don't always, you don't always see them.

R So, you don't like lots of friends, you just like a small group of friends, true friends. What do you regard as a true friend?

S<sub>1</sub> Hmmmm ..... any true friend, they'll help me out in times that I need them, and times I get in trouble and that, they'll help me out. I mean, they haven't like influenced me. they won't say come, let's go rob this house, they're not like that. We share cigarettes, we smoked together, and we like, you know, we were always there for each other, we stand up for one another, when we're in fights, we're always sticking up for each other.

