AN ECOSYSTEMIC PROGRAMME FOR DEALING WITH VANDALISM AT SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

AN ECOSYSTEMIC PROGRAMME FOR DEALING WITH VANDALISM AT SCHOOLS

Vandalism is a complex phenomenon with no easy or single solution. A definition of vandalism underscores this complexity. It is defined as, *inter alia,* the intentional damaging or destroying of objects belonging to others, the voluntary degrading of environments with no profit motive, acts of which the results are considered as damage by the actors as well as the victim in relation to the norms that govern the situation, and the wilful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement, or defacement of property without the consent of the owner. Such social anti-behavioural acts are, however, both internationally and nationally spreading like a virus.

Since schools are increasingly being regarded as soft targets for vandalism, which turns them into dangerous and unsafe places for teaching and learning, this study focused on a programme for dealing with vandalism in schools.

The aim was to determine the effects of school vandalism on the education system, investigate the effects thereof on effective teaching and learning and to - on the basis of the findings obtained from both an in-depth literature study and empirical research design - make suggestions for an inclusive programme which schools can use to assist learners to develop responsible attitudes and behavioural patterns.

An ecosystemic programme was selected as it allowed for a more holistic approach to assess vandalism, as a societal phenomenon, and to provide support/solutions to overcome such a phenomenon. Using Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model of child development, in addition, enabled the researcher to examine the multiple effects and interrelatedness of vandalism, holistically in

school environments. The family, community and school as environmental systems children experience during their development were, accordingly, addressed by employing a systems way of thinking.

The nature and scope of the study are outlined in chapter one. Background information on the prevalence of vandalism in South African schools, which lead to the statement of the research problem, is presented.. In line herewith, the research aims and objectives are highlighted in this chapter. Within the parameters of an ecosystemic approach, the research methodology, incorporating the research paradigm, design, sampling methods as well as the data collection, analysing and interpretation strategies, are addressed.

In order to redefine the research questions, chapter two consists of a discussion of the data obtained through an in-depth literature study on an ecosystemic model and theory as well as a systemic way of thinking. Whilst referring to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development, this chapter also outlines the dynamic processes of child development.

Chapter three elaborates on the information set forward in chapter two, by explaining the different environmental systems children experience. By outlining their different elements and referring to the interdependence between them, the family, community and school as systems are discussed. The application of an ecosystemic theory to school and community interventions are, in addition, discussed.

Within the parameters of an ecosystemic framework, acts of vandalism are scrutinized. By demonstrating the social contents and the underlying assumptions regarding school vandalism, the latter is defined and its causes, impact and effect on teaching and learning in South Africa are addressed with the aim of guiding the study in an explanatory way.

After applying an ecosystemic theory to school and community interventions, chapter three also outlines the historical background and origin of vandalism, the

vandal, the characteristics of vandals, specific motivational factors behind vandalism as well as the negative effects thereof. Following the latter, the causes of vandalism and possible prevention strategies are also identified.

Chapter four, in addition to chapter one, deals with the research design and methodology as well as the issues of measurement in more detail. Flowing from this chapter, chapter five includes the responses obtained from the participants followed by a discussion of the findings according to the data obtained from the interviews and field notes. An interpretation of the findings is provided, recommendations are made and specific limitations of the study are, moreover, identified.

The study ends with a summary of the research conducted and by presenting the final findings which, in turn, lead to proposing various recommendations.

UITTREKSEL

'N EKOSISTEMIESE PROGRAM VIR DIE HANTERING VAN VANDALISME IN SKOLE

Vandalisme is 'n komplekse verskynsel met geen enkelvoudige oplossing nie. 'n Definisie van vandalisme onderstreep die kompleksiteit. Dit word gedefinieerd as, *inter alia,* die doelbewuste beskadiging of vernietiging van voorwerpe wat aan ander behoort, die opsetlike afbreking van die omgewing met geen winsmotief, handelinge waarvan die resultate deur die dader sowel as die slagoffer as skade beskou word met betrekking tot die norme wat die situasie beheer, en die opsetlike of kwaadwillige verwoesting, besering, verminking, of skending van eiendom en/of persone sonder toestemming, Sulke sosiaal onaanvaarbare optredes is egter besig om beide internasionaal en nasionaal soos 'n virus te versprei.

Aangesien skole toenemend as sagte teikens vir vandalisme beskou word, wat hulle in gevaarlike en onveilige plekke vir onderrig en leer verander, fokus hierdie studie op 'n program wat aangewend kan word ten einde met vandalisme in skole te handel.

Die doel was om die uitwerking van skool vandalisme op die onderwys stelsel te bepaal, om die effek daarvan op effektiewe onderrig en leer te ondersoek en om, - op die basis van die bevindinge bekom deur 'n in diepte literatuurstudie en empiriese navorsingsontwerp - voorstelle te maak ten opsigte van 'n inklusiewe program wat skole kan gebruik om leerders by te staan ten einde verantwoordelike houdings en gedragspatrone te ontwikkel.

'n Ekosistemiese program is geselekteer aangesien dit 'n meer holistiese benadering toelaat vir die assessering van vandalisme, as 'n gemeenskaplike verskynsel, en om steun/oplossings te bied om die verskynsel te oorkom. Die gebruikmaking van Bronfenbrenner se ekosistemiese model van kinder

ontwikkeling het, bowenal, die navorser in staat gestel om die meerdere effekte en verbandhoudendheid van vandalisme, holisties in skool omgewings te ondersoek. Die familie, gemeenskap en skool as omgewing sisteme, wat kinders tydens hul ontwikkeling ervaar, is ooreenkomstiglik aangespreek by wyse van 'n sistemiese denkwyse.

Die aard en omvang van die studie word in hoofstuk een geskets. Agtergrond inligting oor die voorkoms van vandalisme in Suid-Afrikaanse skole, wat na die probleemstelling gelei het, word voorsien. In lyn hiermee, word die navorsingsdoel en doelwitte in dié hoofstuk uitgelig. Binne die raamwerk van 'n ekosistemiese benadering, word die navorsingsmetodologie; wat die navorsings paradigma, ontwerp, steekproeftrekking metodes sowel as die data insameling, analise en interpretasie strategieë omsluit; aangespreek.

Ten einde die navorsingsvrae te herdefinieer, bestaan hoofstuk twee uit 'n bespreking van die data wat bekom is deur middel van 'n in-diepte literatuurstudie oor 'n ekosistemiese model, teorie asook 'n sistematiese denkwyse. Terwyl verwys word na Bronfenbrenner se ekologiese model van kinderontwikkeling, omskryf die hoofstuk ook die dinamiese prosesse van kinderontwikkeling

Hoofstuk drie bou voort op die data uiteengesit in hoofstuk twee deur die verskillende omgewing sisteme wat kinders ervaar te verduidelik. Deur hul verskillende elemente uit te lig en te verwys na die interafhanklikheid tussen hulle, word die familie, gemeenskap en skool as sisteme bespreek. Die toepassing van 'n ekosistemiese teorie tot skool en gemeenskap intervensies word, bykomend, bespreek.

Vandalistiese handelinge word binne die grense van 'n ekosistemiese raamwerk ondersoek. Deur die sosiale konteks en die onderliggende aannames aangaande skool vandalisme te betoog, word laasgenoemde gedefinieer en die oorsake, impak en effek daarvan op onderrig en leer in Suid-Afrika aangespreek met die doel om die studie op 'n verduidelikende wyse te begelei.

Nadat 'n ekosistemiese teorie tot skool en gemeenskap intervensies toegepas is, word die historiese agtergrond en oorsprong van vandalisme, die vandaal, die eienskappe van vandale, spesifieke motiveringsfaktore agter vandalisme sowel as die negatiewe effekte daarvan ook in hoofstuk drie geskets. Opvolgend op laasgenoemde, word die oorsake van vandalisme en moontlike voorkoming strategieë geïdentifiseer.

Hoofstuk vier, ter aanvulling van hoofstuk een, handel met die navorsingsontwerp en metodologie sowel as die aangeleenthede van meting in meer detail. Voortvloeiend uit die hoofstuk, sluit hoofstuk vier die antwoorde bekom van die deelnemers gevolg deur 'n bespreking van die bevindinge in ooreenstemming met die data verkry deur middel van die onderhoude en veld notas in. 'n Interpretasie van die bevindinge word voorsien, voorstelle word gemaak en spesifieke beperkinge van die studie word ook geïdentifiseer.

Die studie eindig met 'n opsomming van die navorsing gedoen en deur die voorlegging van die bevindinge wat, op hul beurt, na die voorstelling van sekere aanbevelings gelei het.

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CHAPTER ONE

NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter one consists of an outline of the nature and scope of the research. After presenting some background information on the prevalence of vandalism in South African schools, the research problem is stated. The research aims and objectives are highlighted in line with the ecosystemic approach taken, while the research methodology, incorporating the research paradigm, design, sampling methods as well as the data collection, analysing and interpretation strategies, are addressed. Focus is, moreover, placed on important ethical issues, the feasibility and possible contributions of the study. Looking ahead, the potential of the study is outlined by providing information on the contents of the chapters to follow.

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Vandalism, a complex phenomenon with no easy or single solution (Epstein & Finn, 2002:1; *cf.* 2.1 & 3.4.3), is both internationally and nationally (Christie, 2001:8; Mtshali, 2001:8; Steyn, 2002:253; De Wet, 2004:206) spreading like a virus. As indicated by Wilbert (2001:556), vandalism is as rampant in subareas as in inner-city school areas of South Africa. Violence, to the contrary, is found by Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009:43) to be more prevalent in inner-city schools than in suburban schools, although occurring mainly outside school grounds.

Although various definitions are presented for vandalism (Stahl, 2000:138; Black, 2002a:2; Horowitz & Tolbaly, 2003:1; Johnson, 2005:14; *cf.* 3.4), all definitions, nevertheless, consist of some common elements, such as the *intentional damaging or destroying of objects belonging to others, the voluntary degrading of environments with no profit motive, acts of which the results are considered as*

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damage by the actors as well as the victim in relation to the norms that govern the situation, and the wilful or malicious destruction, injury, disfigurement, or defacement of property without the consent of the owner.

With specific reference to school vandalism, De Wet (2010:195; *cf.* 3.4) cautions that although some learners may regard vandalism as innocent acts of horseplay, it is perceived by the victims thereof as malicious acts to disempower them as professionals and human beings.

Cohen (2002:138) shows that more than half of all crimes associated with vandalism in South Africa occur in high schools and are, as set forth by Sadler (2001:556), committed by learners enrolled in those schools specifically. Schools are, however, also regularly vandalized by herdsmen, gangsters, drop-outs, ex-learners and learners from neighbouring schools (De Wet, 2004:206). Statistics, as referred to by Wilbert (2001:206), indicate that the largest age group arrested for vandalism, thus far, is between 13 and 14 years of age. De Wet (2004:206; *cf.* 3.4.2), on the other hand, points out that learners, particularly boys between the ages of 14 and 19, are the most frequent vandals at schools. In this regard, research conducted by Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009:43) indicates that violence on the other hand, involving the use of weapons, such as scissors, is more prevalent among girls than among boys. Children as young as six years of age have, however, also been caught vandalizing schools and national park areas.

Cohen (2002:138), a sociologist, has, through intensive research, recognized the following categories of learners who vandalize school property:

- The vindictive, who carries a grudge against a particular educator or other staff member.
- The malicious, who commits his/her acts out of sheer devilry.
- The ideological, who wishes to dramatize some particular stance.
- The acquisitive, who combines destruction with theft.
- The bored learner, which has few constructive outlets for his/her energies.

- The frustrated, who sees the easily accessible neighbourhood school as a symbol of the society which he/she believes is callously indifferent to his/her needs and inspirations, and against which he/she can express all his/her rage and importance through school vandalism.

While teenagers, who encountered lots of problems during their growing-up years, act destructively by misusing vehicles and/or spray-painting graffiti on public places, older youth often commit more serious acts such as damaging vehicles or machinery, burglary, arson or theft (Cohen, 2002:138; *cf.* 3.2.1 & 3.4.4).

It is thus evident that buildings alone are not the targets of vandalism; their furnishing and equipment are also at prey. Educators' cars are scratched and their tyres slashed, while incidents of throwing eggs at educators' homes, trashing their private property and defacing it with graffiti are also prevalent (De Wet, 2010:195). Sadler (2001:556), however, shows that in recent years, vandalism, arson and malicious mischief have mostly been directed towards institutional properties. While many administrators are aware of the high cost of breakage, forced entry and spray paint graffiti, few realize, according to Sadler (2001:556) that some sixty percent of school fire now originates as arson or during an act of vandalism.

Msiza from the Department of Education (News 24) reports that this department had to budget R87 million for maintaining and repairing damages to school buildings in one year alone. Within this budget, the Gauteng Education Department allocated R5 million for various security arrangements in this province (Valley *et al.,* 2002:86). The latter includes indirect expenses incurred such as insurance policies, security guards and other presumed deterrents to vandalism which, in view of Mayer *et al.* (1983:355; *cf.* 3.4), tend to exceed the cost of repairing the effects of vandalism. Resulting from the latter, Harber (2001:270) posits that school managers are left with less money to buy, among others, new textbooks, computers and sport equipment.

As the Department of Education aims at buying more and more expensive equipment for schools to uplift the overall quality of education, - equipment which, when unprotected becomes an almost sure target for vandals - the importance of dealing effectively with school vandalism becomes increasingly essential. In this regard, De Wet (2004:206) points out that vandalism often causes teaching and learning to collapse as school programmes must be interrupted in order to repair vandalized structures.

Vandalism *per se* has become a social obstacle, which adolescents are most likely to encounter on their way to adulthood (De Wet, 2005:146; Prinsloo, 2004:158). The latter occurs, despite learners having the right to be taught, play and develop to their full potential (The South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996: Preamble) in neat, clean and safe school buildings and grounds (The Constitution of the RSA, Act 108 of 1996: section 24; *cf.* 3.2.3). Despite various strategies to combat crime at schools having already been incorporated, vandalism keeps on escalating. An example can be found in the case of a school on the Cape Flats that installed an electric fence to prevent vandalism, specifically, but the fence was misused as learners took turns to throw co-learners against it. Vandalism and the concomitant disruption of lectures, was also the main causes leading to the closure of the Durban University of Technology as recent as August 2010 as students and staff members, alike, feared for their own safety (MacFarlane & Hoffmann, 2010:14; *cf.* 3.5).

With reference to the competing demands that result from rapidly changing social environments (*cf.* 2.2.1 & 3.4) Naidu *et al.* (2008:1; *cf.* 3.2.2) place emphasis on the huge challenges placed on the management of education in general and the leadership and management at schools in particular (*cf.* 2.1). In support hereof, Liese (2008:90; *cf.* 3.2.3 & 3.3) indicates that it is the responsibility of the people, systems and organizations, impacting on young people's lives, to support healthy growth and development opportunities for all. Bester and Du Plessis (2010:205), concurrently, stress that it is the primarily task of schools to act as institutions of teaching and learning and, therefore, to manage those elements that negatively

affect this task. To transform education and provide all learners with maximum learning opportunities, Naidu *et al.* (2008:2) and Serfontein (2010:99; *cf.* 3.2.3.1) urge school leaders to make a concerted effort to understand the South African education arena and its historical context so that they are able to embrace issues of change and give effective direction to schools.

The latter implies the necessity of comprehensive research concerning the social well-being of learners (defined by Rudolph *et al.* (2008:6) as physical and emotional health and safety) and development of the youth (Steyn *et al.*, 2010:173; *cf.* 2.2.2). As such, this research sets out to explore some educational management implications brought along by vandalism. It is argued that the effectiveness of interactions by the individual educator (*cf.* 3.2.3.2), will have a correlation with the support systems created by educational management teams and that the structures and ethos of care (*cf.* 3.3) as created by management are vital parts in combating school vandalism (Weeks, 2009:7). In particular, the process of establishing, at schools, a climate of successful, meaningful and open communication about vandalism relies, as portrayed by Oosthuizen (2005:202), on the provision of personal support systems (*cf.* 3.2.2) for educators and learners. Such support is, according to Reid (2009:193), dependent upon an educational management team that is able and willing to prioritize social issues and to challenge aspects of its own management thinking (*cf.* 3.2.3.1).

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Black (2002b:64) points out that, whenever South African schools are visited, one is likely to find buildings that are vandalized. Windows, desks and chairs are broken, tennis courts are ruined, ceilings hang from roofs, water taps are stolen, fences and gates are either totally absent or run-down, and walls are covered with graffiti.

During a radio interview, an educator's spokesperson, Funeka (News 24), indicates that it has become quite normal to find schools with windows and doors broken, electricity cables stolen and blackboards smashed. She also views her

concern about the absence of fences at schools as it leads to vandalism increasing. In line with the latter, the media also reports the prevalence of vandalism leading to the police arresting learners on a daily basis.

Cummis (2003:207), similarly, indicates that regular reports of intentional damage to laboratory equipment and office machines, overturned furniture, toilets blown out of the floor by cherry bombs and paint splashed over the walls, windows, desktops and chalkboards are received by the administrators of schools in all white, upper and middle-class communities. Vandalism, however, does not only cause economic losses. As school vandalism intensifies, East London educators at Msobomvu High School at Zikhova near Chauluma, for example, also fear for their lives (News 24). As a result, educators feel unsafe, angry and negative towards those they aspire to educate, which, in turn, leads to a lack of motivation to assist learners within the learning environment (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010:225&227; *cf.* 3.2.3.2). Valley *et al.* (2002:87), in addition, opine that the habitual and frequent nature of violence at schools has induced a dangerous feeling of disempowerment among educators resulting in their staying away from schools. The occurrence of violence, such as vandalism also causes a collapse of trust and communication (De Wet, 2010:199).

Incidents like the above necessitated the Mpumalanga Member of the Executive Council for Education, Mr Masango (News 24) to appeal directly to learners, specifically at township and rural schools, to guard against vandalism. This will, however, not be enough as more drastic measures are needed. Bender and Emslie (2010:55; *cf.* 3.3), concurrently, emphasize the need for a more comprehensive prevention approach which should include families, caregivers and the community at large. Despite the latter, the Human Rights Commission (SAHRC, 1999; *cf.* 3.2.3.2) reports on a lack of structured programmes to assist educators to deal with diversity in classrooms and a total lack of violence (vandalism included) prevention programmes in the formal running of schools.

In addressing school vandalism, an ecosystemic model as conceptual framework was employed in this study to expose this societal phenomenon heuristically (De Vos, 2009:35; *cf.* 2.2). An ecosystemic approach was, moreover, taken as Saunderson and Oswald (2009:142) show that the training of educators is recommended in order to understand and manage challenging learner behaviour successfully and Bouwer (2005:51; *cf.* 2.2.2) maintains that it allows for a more holistic approach to assess problems and provide support to overcome such problems. As such, a person-in-context approach to the prevention of vandalism is taken as it allows for a more complete understanding of the development and prevention of aggression among the youth (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This was done on the notion that vandalism is structurally linked to wider social relations and the economic, political and social fabric of society (Valley *et al.*, 2002:81). Present-day vandalism in education must, thus, be understood with reference to the wider context in which it occurs (*cf.* 3.4.3).

Horowitz and Amir (2003:6) assert that studies on vandalism are mainly divided into two broad categories namely, epidemiological and ecosystemic (social contextual) studies. Epidemiological studies focus on individuals who commit vandalism due to emotional problems and personal traits such as difficulties in adjusting to society at large and to school in particular, whereas ecosystemic studies - started in the 1930s by the Chicago school (Moser, 1994:70) - place emphasis on the social context in which vandalism occurs. In this context, vandalism is explained as the malaise of modern society, characterized by alienation and meaninglessness (*cf.* 3.2.1).

In South Africa, the ecosystemic approach (Donald *et al.*, 2002) has, thus far, made a valuable contribution in overcoming the limitations of medical model thinking, in that it focused on the broader social context in which problems manifest themselves. It also contributes to a more complex understanding of problems, where interrelatedness and mutual dependency is a given (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001:148; *cf.* 2.3 & 2.4).

Objective parameters within the social context that have an effect on school vandalism are, as discovered by Heller and White (2004:11; *cf.* 3.2.3.2 & 3.4), school size, age of the learner population, educator turnover and parental support – or rather the lack thereof - for schools' discipline policies. Research was conducted by these authors on the connection between vandalism, school effectiveness and learning. De Wet (2004:206), on the other hand, found that juridical, economic, drug and alcohol, as well as learner-related problems are important causes of school vandalism and that educator and school management practices are less important causes.

With reference to ecosystemic studies based on the principles of Bronfenbrenner's theory of human development, Cloete and Buntings (1999:16) argue that it is important to gain sufficient knowledge on the principles of ecology (the language of nature) and to become literate before applying ecosystemic studies to human communities. Emphasis during such studies should, according to Epstein (2002:20; *cf.* 2.4), be placed on holistic thinking (holistically to a human state of being) since ecology concerns the study of living communities to which holistic human thinking applies.

In conducting an ecosystemic study during their research, Horowitz and Amir (2003:6) employed five regression analyses (*i.e* level of vandalism, school anxiety, attitude towards home, educator and school; *cf.* 3.4.3) as independent variables, in accordance with five motives (frustration, boredom, catharsis, creativity and general motivation to participate in acts of vandalism) as dependent variables. It was found that in three of the five regression analyses, attitude toward school explained the motivation behind vandalism. In two regression analyses, school anxiety and negative attitudes toward educators made a significant contribution (*cf.* 2.2.1).

In view of the above, a careful study needs to be made of the learner vandal and his/her environment as the well-being of individuals is influenced by environmental factors – by way of acknowledging specific ecological factors. This

is also important because of the fundamental interrelation of body, mind and environment (Capra, 1982:341; *cf.* 2.2) and since it has the potential to provide essential information useful for correcting or controlling vandalized behaviour (Maree, 2008:55). In this regard, Valley *et al.* (2002:81-82 & 86; *cf.* 3.2.2) opine that what happens outside schools gates will inevitably impact on the gains made at schools and that the violent atmosphere in South African schools is a clear reflection of the broader society. Fleisch and Christie (2004:95), similarly, argue that the quality of teaching and learning, principally for disadvantaged learners, is inextricably coupled to wider social, economic and political conditions. Because of enormous changes in the South African education system since 1994, the researcher also proposes that a different theoretical lens be employed in order to understand the impact of wider social changes on schools.

An ecosystemic anthropological perspective takes a systems view of nature and the occurrence of societal problems as a consequence of disharmony and imbalance, which play a pivotal role when a holistic approach is taken (Capra, 1982:337-338; *cf.* 2.2.1). The same author also emphasizes that, to obtain better anthropological insight, issues such as educator and learner wellness should be studied by taking a broader perspective, such as the ecosystemic model.

This model accentuates not only the holistic *unitas* complex nature of wellbeing (the functioning of the different domains or contexts of a person's life, the uplifting of all of which promotes the wellness of the person), but also that the promotion of wellness is a life-long process (Kirsten *et al.*, 2009:6; *cf.* 2.2.1). The latter constitutes, as put forward by Kirsten *et al.* (2009:1), a significant attempt to develop a unified approach to the mind/body system of a new holistic paradigm regarding the problem of vandalism, as opposed to the traditional practice of associating vandalism with specific causes.

Since this research aimed at focusing on vandalism as a related societal problem associated with social change, an ecosystemic approach was followed, while arguing that educators and learners' perspectives on teaching and learning could

be negatively influenced by the extent of vandalism that is currently experienced in South Africa and in Sebokeng (*cf.* 4.4.1) specifically. Knowledge about principals' perspectives is extremely important as they directly influence schools as systems and the teaching and learning process (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010:203). The researcher also acknowledges that it also has a negative effect on the progressive provision of quality education to all learners as the ideal envisaged by the South African Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996 in its Preamble. As a result, the aim of this research, namely to develop of a programme that can successfully be implemented to deal with vandalism concertedly in schools, is palpable.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In taking an ecosystemic approach to vandalism as a societal-related problem at South African schools, the following questions need to be answered:

- What is the nature and extent of school vandalism in Sebokeng?
- What are the most important causes of acts of school vandalism committed by learners?
- How does vandalism affect teaching and learning?
- Which intervention strategies are suitable to control vandalism at South African schools?

1.5 RESEARCH AIMS

In order to explore, describe and explain school vandalism by applying an ecosystemic approach, this study aims to:

- explore the nature and extent of school vandalism in Sebokeng in order to gain insight into this phenomenon and to get acquainted with the current situation;
- describe the most important causes of acts of vandalism committed by learners in order to create a general picture of conditions and explain the

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reasons why school vandalism occurs;

- review the effect of vandalism on teaching and learning; and

- recommend intervention strategies, suitable to control vandalism at South African schools.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With the purpose of studying vandalism at schools by learners, an ecosystemic anthropological perspective was followed. Such a perspective aims at acquiring knowledge of the nature of humans. Conclusions were, accordingly, drawn and suggestions made regarding this phenomenon in terms of taking a holistic approach to human behaviour and development. At a deeper philosophical level, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm was followed in the sense that reality was carefully constructed and interpreted in the way humans encounter their world as well as deal with problems presented by reality. In addition, ways on how to solve this societal problem were provided, in accordance with transcendental pragmatism (Fleisch & Christie, 2004:95; *cf.* 4.1 & 4.2). The latter enabled the researcher to investigate vandalism as a phenomenon that influences all human ecosystems.

In order to research school violence, this study aimed at following a systematic, controlled, empirical and critical investigation of this natural phenomenon, guided by an eco-systemic model (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:3; De Vos, 2009:41; *cf.* 4.4).

1.6.1 Research design and methods

Scientific research is used to find a solution to a problem or to improve an existing solution. It helps the researcher to gain more knowledge on a research problem and thus come up with recommendations and conclusions.

A thorough review of literature on the impact of vandalism at schools was conducted in order to demonstrate the underlying assumptions regarding school vandalism and to redefine the research questions (Delport & Fouché, 2009:263;

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cf. 4.1). The aim was to define vandalism, determine its causes and impact on the Department of Education, schools, educators, school governors and learners (*cf.* 3.4). Intervention programmes or strategies to control vandalism were derived from all the available data bases, for example, Google, EBSCO Host web and various sources such as the internet, dissertations and journal articles.

A qualitative, empirical research design was selected to describe and analyse the participants' individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions in an attempt to put the subjective beliefs of the researcher aside (De Vos, 2009:41; *cf.* 4.3.2). A qualitative research was done as it is the design best suited to answer *how* and *what* questions, to explore school vandalism that is in dire need of a detailed description, and to study participants in their natural setting (Fouché & De Vos, 2009:102-103; *cf.* 4.5.1). In line with this, the researcher endeavoured to develop a comprehensive understanding of school vandalism by reporting from multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in this social phenomenon by way of an ecosystemic approach placing emphasis on the social contents in which it occurs, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerged (Creswell, 2009:174; *cf.* 4.4).

1.6.2 Field of study

According to Fouché and De Vos (2009:104), the *unit of analysis* refers to the individuals or objects from which the social researcher collects data. Following a qualitative research design, the researcher was allowed to provide an in-depth description of a group of principals within their day-to-day setting in order to produce insider perspectives (Mouton, 2004:148; *cf.* 4.3.2).

Sebokeng is located to the south of Johannesburg – the main industrial centre of South Africa. The Sebokeng area consists of a predominantly low-income population where high unemployment occurs. Sebokeng was purposively selected on the basis of this area's potential to provide rich data (school vandalism is visible in this area) and is, as such, an area that maximizes the opportunity to engage the problem (Fouché, 2009:278; *cf.* 4.3.1). Archibugi

(1997:166), similarly, states that an urban system is a more appropriate place of ecosystemic measurement, evaluation and management. Sebokeng was thus also selected based on the assumption that economic and geographical variables may influence the perceptions of the education role-players (*cf.* 4.3.1). This assumption flows directly from the ecosystemic paradigm about the nature of vandalism as a social reality (Delport & Fouché, 2009:262).

Flowing from this assumption, particularities rather than generalizations (*cf.* 4.5) were identified from the daily practical experience of principals, as caring professionals, within Sebokeng, and then systematized as scientific theory, moulded into an ecosystemic model that will, in future, not only guide daily teaching and learning, but ultimately move principals and educators closer to being true professionals able to provide better quality education to learners (De Vos, 2009:42).

1.6.3 Data collection, analysis and interpretation strategies

Observation and interviews were utilized as data collection instruments as they were certain to ensure a representative body of data on the views of a quantitative significant number of participants from various backgrounds and socio-economic strata, living and working under similar circumstances in accordance with the eco-systemic model (Steyn *et al.*, 2010:175; *cf.* 4.4).

Participants were observed by the researcher who spent time in the natural setting and made field notes on the behaviour and activities of the participants in order to understand the occurrence of vandalism as experienced from their perspective (Creswell, 2009:181) and to maximize observational efficiency, minimize observer bias and allow for verification of data (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:676; *cf.* 4.4.1).

Face-to-face interviews consisting of semi-structured questions were conducted with the selected principals in an attempt to see the world through their eyes (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87; *cf.* 4.4.2). Since principals are regarded as being the

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driving force at schools (Roffey, 2008:32; *cf.* 3.2.3.1) and, as such, the leaders responsible for change and the ones who should take a stand against vandalism at schools, interviews were only held with them. Principals were also targeted as they operate as the managers of schools, responsible to lead, direct, organize and control schools (Singh, 2007:547). As a result, Bush (2007:392) indicates that it is the task of principals, as school leaders, to shape the actions of others by continuously setting goals in accordance to altering demands and to uphold efficiency and affectivity.

The data collection and analysis phases were employed as interactive research processes, occurring in overlapping cycles (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:405). The research problem statement and concomitant research questions were used to focus the data collection efforts. After the data was collected by means of both observations and interviews, it was constructed in order to find all the *facts* it presented. The data was then reconstructed into different categories (*cf.* 5.2) in order to synthesize a holistic sense of the totality. In view of the latter, different parts of the data were scrutinized to establish its specific relationship to the whole. Before the data could be interpreted, various tables were drawn to present its instructiveness (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:407).

1.7 ETHICAL ISSUES

Appointments with the principals were arranged telephonically to set the time for visiting schools. The researcher visited schools personally and obtained the voluntary participation of all participants. The purpose of the study was explained both verbally and in writing to all participants, who were also assured that their names would not be disclosed, as the goal of this research was to obtain the truth (Mouton, 2004:239). Permission to conduct the research was, in addition, requested and obtained from the District Director of Education.

In order to facilitate informed consent by the participants, all the necessary information pertaining to the research, including the nature, purpose, usefulness,

procedure, confidentiality, the protection of anonymity and the voluntary nature of participation in the research were given.

Application for ethical approval was done at the North-West University according to the prescribed form.. Feedback on results will be given to the relevant department(s). Data obtained, will not be used for purposes other than this study.

1.8 FEASIBILITY OF THE STUDY

This study was feasible since:

- it was conducted at schools in Sebokeng, which were easily accessible to the researcher;
- the researcher is working as an educator at a school in the Gauteng Department of Education which ensured accessibility, cooperation, confidence (Fouché, 2009:272) and the opportunity for the researcher to spend considerable time in the natural setting, gathering information (Creswell, 2009:178);
- literature resources for gathering information were sufficiently available; and
- the research was not too costly nor time-consuming.

1.9 CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Vandalism of education buildings in South Africa can be defined as the wilful, senseless and illegal destruction of state property (Johnson, 2005:14). This includes theft, breaking and entering, as well as wanton damage to school property owned or leased by the State.

In terms of section 20(1)(g) of the Schools Act, Act 84 of 1996, the Governing Body of a public school must administer and control school property *i.e.* the buildings and grounds occupied by the school, including hostels, if applicable. In this regard, this study aimed at suggesting grounded propositions and providing explanations of vandalism so that governors and managers could understand this behaviour in order to enhance their ability to make informed decisions for future

actions. As such, this study contributed to theory, educational practice, policy making and social consciousness about school vandalism (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:393).

The overall aim of the study was, thus, to assist administrators, school management, educators and learners to ensure that effective teaching and learning transpire. To achieve the latter, schools must be assisted in having more or less the same operational strategies in place to control school vandalism.

1.10 CHAPTER DIVISION

In order to structure this research, it was divided into the following chapters:

CHAPTER 1: NATURE AND SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1 covers the introduction, problem statement, purpose and scope of the study, the research design and methodology, as well as ethical issues. The feasibility and possible contributions of the study are also addressed.

CHAPTER 2: AN ECOSYSTEMIC THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Chapter 2 presents data obtained by way of a literature study and addresses the theoretical ecosystemic framework in which the study is conducted. An ecosystemic model and theory as well as a systemic way of thinking are, accordingly, discussed. Whilst referring to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development, this chapter also outlines the dynamic processes of child development. Figures, to illustrate the data presented are, moreover, provided to obtain clarity.

CHAPTER 3: SCHOOL VANDALISM WITHIN A THEORETICAL ECOSYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK

In collaborating on the information set forward in chapter two, this chapter explains the different environmental systems children experience. The family, community and school as systems are discussed in detail with reference to their

composition, different elements and influences on the child, as developing human beings. With regards to schools, the important roles of the principal, educator and parents are outlined. The application of an ecosystemic theory, as discussed in chapter two, to school and community interventions are, in addition, referred to.

Chapter three, moreover, presents information on vandalism in general and defines the concepts *vandalism* and *vandals*. In line with these, the causes of vandalism, the impact thereof on schools, and different categories of break-ins are scrutinized.

This chapter also includes important information on the motivation for vandalism, offender characteristics, common vandalism, locations and typical entry points.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the empirical design is debated while its strengths and weaknesses are highlighted. The research methods and instruments are also discussed in detail.

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Chapter 5 provides a detailed analysis of the data collected, as well as an in-depth interpretation thereof.

CHAPTER 6: SUMMATION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter provides a summation on the data collected, draws attention to the findings made and offers recommendations as guidelines against the background of the data obtained through the literature study and the results attained by way of the empirical research.

1.11 SUMMARY

Chapter one provided data on the nature and scope of this study by outlining the fact that vandalism at schools places a heavy burden on education departments

and school budgets (Stout, 2002:2). It became evident that vandalism leads to money, allotted for building new schools and buying resources to improve the overall quality of education, being used to repair and/or replace vandalized school buildings and equipment.

Since vandalism, as a crime, causes feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty and fear among educators and learners (Asmall, 1999:3), its occurrence leads to destroying the basis of a learning community. If schools want to provide quality teaching and learning in future, the Department of Education, School Governing Bodies, principals and School Management Teams should come up with flexibly strategies to control school vandalism. To assist them with this enormous task, the researcher proposes an ecosystemic model to be utilized in order to understand the impact of wider social changes on schools.

In line with taking an ecosystemic approach to vandalism, the research questions and aims were posed, the research design and methods were provided, ethical issues were addressed and the feasibility and contribution of the study were highlighted. A provisional division of the forthcoming chapters was also supplied.

The following chapter focuses on an ecosystemic framework in which the study was conducted with the aim of providing a theoretical background to chapter three, which deals with vandalism within such a framework.

CHAPTER TWO

A THEORETICAL ECOSYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK

2.1 INTRODUCTION

While chapter one provided the overall nature and scope of the study, this chapter consists of data collected through a literature study in order to present the theoretical ecosystemic framework in which the study was conducted.

Within the ambit of the above, an encosystemic model and - theory are discussed. The latter is done by casting light on the four nested systems, namely the micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems surrounded by the chrono-system as well as on their inter-connectedness with regard to the development of human beings.

Whilst referring to Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development, this chapter also outlines the dynamic processes of child development. A systemic way of thinking is, moreover, explained as an ecosystemic model necessitates thinking in terms of relationships, connectedness and context to explain mutual relationships between people, communities and institutions.

In order to clarify the data presented in both this chapter and chapter three, figures are, where applicable, provided.

2.2 AN ECOSYSTEMIC MODEL

An ecosystemic approach to well-being and wellness is based on two major assumptions. The first is that the human being is a whole, a complete person of whom certain attributes can be distinguished, but never separated. The human being is, thus, a totality - a complete whole. This assumption is shared by the South African Department of Health (SA, 2000:16) by insisting on the creation of effective teaching and learning through the holistic development of learners and

schools. The second assumption flows from the first, *viz.* that when the well-being and wellness of a person are contemplated, the matter should be approached multi-dimensionally, as well as multi-disciplinarily (Pilon, 2003:3). These two assumptions agree with the 20th century's realisation that mind, soul and body are not as separate as previously thought. This new realization gave birth to new conceptualizations (Kirsten, 2009:2), such as *psychobiology* (Dewsbury, 1991:198-203), and, after factoring in other ecological aspects (Dewsbury, 1991:199) Engel's holistic bio-psychosocial model (Coleman, 2003:92; Jordaan & Jordaan, 2000:554), as well as Bronfenbrenner's (1986:736) ecological and systems theory or holistic ecosystemic model.

By placing emphasis on a holistic view (the social model; *cf.* 1.3), Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001:148), point out that extra focus is normally placed on the broader social context in which problems are visible, than on the problem *per se.* The latter contributes to a more complex understanding of problems such as vandalism, where inter-relatedness and mutual reliance is a set. In this way social, cultural and environmental vulnerabilities are understood and dealt with under different circumstances of space and time as the simultaneous effect of all dimensions of being-in-the-world, as they encourage actions (deficits and assets), deal with consequences (desired or undesired) and contribute to change (Pilon, 2003:1).

Bender and Emslie (2010:56), concurrently, refer to empirical evidence indicating that societal-issues such as vandalism can successfully be addressed if the development stages of the child as well as the impact of their immediate environment are taken notice of. The latter approach is also in line with recent research tendencies to put equal focus on learners' well-being as on their academic performance (Van Petegen *et al.*, 2008:451).

Instead of focusing on fragmented and reduced representations of reality, the connections (assets) and ruptures (deficits) between the different dimensions are considered, providing a planning model to develop management and teaching

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programmes to deal with societal problems by redirecting learners' lives and social behaviour (Maree, 2008:56). The methodology is participatory, experiential and reflexive. Heuristic hermeneutic processes are employed to unveil cultural and epistemic paradigms that orient subject-object relationships; giving people the opportunity to reflect on their own realities, engage in new experiences and find new ways to better their lives (Pilon, 2003:1). To solve societal problems, Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001:149; *cf.* 3.4) postulate that, although the deficiencies in any given eco-system or subsystem must not be negated, focus should rather be placed on strengthening the inherent assets in a system, which will then, in turn, enable humans to address existing deficiencies effectively.

Konayashi (1993:26) points out that a child grows and develops through interactive processes between his or her inborn programs and the environment, which is composed of micro-, mini-, meso- and macro-ecosystems. In these ecosystems, there are natural, physio-chemical, biological and socio-cultural ecological factors.

On acknowledging that individuals are also significantly affected by interactions among a number of overlapping ecosystems such as schools, families, community agencies and non-governmental agencies, Bronfenbrenner (1986:736) developed an ecological and systems theory. Hall and Hord (2001:32) indicate that the individual lies at the heart of Bronfenbrenner's system, while Pilon (2003:2) points out that human existence should be understood as the focal point of these overlapping *worlds*.

An ecosystemic framework targets changes that occur in every community system, while casting light on the interaction between such systems which contributes to the development and maintenance of human beings (Fullan, 2000:23). According to Di Scipio (2003), an understanding of interaction in terms of a network of interdependencies among system components, and in terms of the system dynamics and its *structural coupling* to the external environment is thus essential. In this regard, Hall and Hord (2001:46) emphasize the need for

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community development and maintenance strategies within community system networks as they can assist educational managers and governors to view learners, educators and parents (the primary and core role-players in education) as part of various social systems such as biological, community, society and global systems in order to integrate tactical and strategic techniques across diverse educational management and governance practices.

Ecosystems are, theoretically, grounded in a socio-ecological framework and family system (Michell, 2001:16). Freedman (2001:85) acknowledges that an ecological system model emphasizes an empirically supported approach to using researched knowledge to examine and explain the etiological (causes) and risk factors within social systems that promote particular psychophysical and social problems.

In light of the above, this research endeavours to employ an ecosystemic (ecological and systems) theoretical framework as a powerful tool for firstly establishing the causes of vandalism as well as the dangerous issues present in different systems surrounding the learning, and, secondly, for developing interventions that can bind schools, families and communities together in their struggle against school vandalism.

A three-level ecological model was used to represent the complexity of the risk factors, as well as the influence of vandalism on the victims, their work and their social environment, while underlining the interaction between biological, psychological, cultural and economical factors (*cf.* 2.2.2). The first level identifies biological and personal factors such as demographic characteristics, personality disorders and a history of experiencing, witnessing or engaging in anti-social behaviour which influences the way individuals behave. The second level focuses on the organizational and institutional factors that shape or structure the environment within which the individual exists and in which interpersonal relations occur (De Wet, 2010:194). These include rules, policies and acceptable behaviour within more formal organizations (schools).

The third level examines at the broad social factors that help to create a climate in which vandalism is encouraged or inhibited; the social and cultural norms, the acceptability of vandalism and violence, as well as political instability. This was done on the assumption that vandalism may have a negative influence on the well-being of the victims and is caused by obstacles regarding a person's biological genes and his/her personality trends (first level), on the functioning of schools as organizations (teaching and learning milieu: second level) and on home-community-school relations (third level). Flowing from the latter, it is also argued by the researcher that any intervention programme to deal with and combat vandalism at schools should be done at all three levels.

The researcher also believes that, by using an ecosystemic approach an over-arching theoretical framework would be established with the potential of assessing and linking various variables such as educator and learner behaviour, principals' perceptions and commitment, school climate, vandal characteristics, and social factors together as predictors of an effective program to combat vandalism at South African schools.

In order to understand the full scope of a theoretical ecosystemic framework, it is necessary to first explain important concepts relating thereto.

2.2.1 An ecosystemic theory

Two concepts are involved when an ecological system theory is referred to, namely ecology and systems. The word *ecology* stems from the Greek word *okos* which means family unit. Ecology, therefore, refers to a study on the operating of the world as a family unit. It refers, more precisely, to a study of the relationships that interlink all members as part of earth's family unit (Bronfenbrenner, 1986:726). In this regard, Donald *et al.* (2002:41) define an ecosystemic perspective as *a blend of ecological and systems theory views of human interactions between individuals and between different levels of the social context.*

The word *system,* on the other hand, as pointed out by Burke (1999:23), implies a perceived whole as it is composed of different elements hanging together. Loock *et al.* (2009:2) show that the essential properties that define any system are the properties of the whole and that no one part can operate on its own. If the system is taken apart, it loses its defining characteristics. This is important to take cognisance of when dealing with families as systems which are broken up by events such as; *inter alia;* divorce, the death of a member or urbanisation (*cf.* 3.2.1) as these systems, thereupon, lose their major characteristic of being havens of security and affection, nurturing the child to adulthood. The same occurs when communities (*cf.* 3.2.2) and/or schools (cf. 3.2.3) are taken apart. The different elements within a system continuously affect one another over time, depending on the elements' interaction with other elements of the system, while aiming at reaching a common purpose. The actions of the individual and the organisation, thus, continuously feed back upon and influence one another (Loock *et al.*, 2009:8; *cf.* 3.2.1).

While concentrating solely on an ecological theory, Donald *et al.* (2002:45) explain relationships between different organisms and their physical environment, while highlighting the interdependence nature of such relationships. Based on the latter, the researcher endeavoured to explain the various relationships learners have with other individuals (parents, educators and peer groups), as well as with their immediate environment (home, school and community) through stressing that the interreliant nature of such relationships may lead to vandalism and, alternatively, can be employed to combat school vandalism.

Di Scipio (2003:5) refers to the dynamic interdependencies among systems components as systems *acts upon* the environment, observe the latter's reactions, and then react to the environment's response. Guskey's (2000:45) conceptualization of the ecology of human development, in addition, provides a useful theoretical framework as it proposes that human development is influenced by factors operating at different levels within a broader ecological

structure. Since children are still in the crucial phases of their human development (a lasting change in the way a child perceives and deals with his/her environment: Bronfenbrenner, 1979a:3; *cf.* 3.4.3) during their school-going years, the researcher suggests that acts of school vandalism stem from issues present at altered levels within their wider environmental construction.

In this regard, Kirsten *et al.* (2009:3) show that failure on the part of an individual to relate appropriately to the context of any system, will be detrimental to his/her well-being and wellness. Examples of *at risk factors* that may lead to learner failure to engage meaningful with systems and contribute towards the vulnerability of learners, mentioned by Rudolph *et al.* (2008:7-8) are, *inter alia*, that of learners being deprived of love and care, not having good role models, living in poverty, receiving poor schooling, being abused, neglected or exploited, suffer from a fetal alcohol syndrome, treated as outsiders in the school and the community and being bullied and victimized. For this reason, the researcher accepts that, if learners are confronted with issues which they cannot deal with effectively, they become frustrated and angry at society (*cf.* 3.4.1). Such anger is then projected through vandalism, which should rather be seen as learners crying out for help.

It is, consequently, essential that human beings are equipped with the necessary tools to enable them to react in appropriate ways upon changes they detect in their external conditions. Instilling caring attitudes among education role players can, as put forward by Weeks (2010:1; *cf*. 1.3), make an immense difference to learners' life and scholastic performance as their lives become more meaningful and their quality of relationships improves. If basic values of respect and dignity are, thus, restored learners begin to act in more responsible ways as their self-image is positively reinforced. Learners, in addition, become more prepared to embark on a career plan as skills and values regarding cooperation, continuity and stability emerge.

Donald *et al.* (2002:45; *cf.* 1.2) stress that a human being's relationship with his/her environment must be seen holistically, as each part is important in sustaining the cycles of birth and death, regeneration and decay, which together ensure the survival of the whole system. Bronfenbrenner (1979a:3) also shows that it is often necessary to look beyond single settings to take cognisance of the relation between diverse settings. A useful example to assist in understanding Donald's concept is the spider's web (see Figure 1.1) which illustrates that anything happening in any part of the web (like a fly being caught) keeps the system going (feeds the spider). But in the process, the web can be broken and must be repaired – and so the cycle continues. In the same sense, Kirsten *et al.* (2009:3) indicate that a change in any of the constitutive elements or domains of the living person will affect every other aspect, element or domain.

By regarding different behavioural patterns as the web children spin around themselves, the researcher poses that children establish reference networks for themselves which can be referred to whenever they are called upon to socialize with others or to cope with life in general. If their behaviour, based on these networks, is regarded as acceptable by others or helps them to cope effectively with life's demands, they receive positive feedback which encourages them to reproduce the same behaviour (and so the cycle continues). If unacceptable or insufficient behaviour is, however, displayed (acts of vandalism), negative feedback is received and the web is broken and need to be repaired if reoccurrence is to be avoided.

It is, moreover, important to realize that schools and classrooms as systems and subsystems are not islands unto themselves and, consequently, their interdependence with other systems must be acknowledged in addressing and understanding anti-social behaviour among learners (Saunderson & Oswald, 2009:155).

Figure 1.1: The spider's web

Another important notion which needs understanding is ecological balance (*cf.* 1.3). When relationships and cycles within a system are in balance, the system is sustained. If minor changes or radical distortions occur, the balance will, however, be threatened and should be dealt with immediately in order to combat long-term consequences.

According to Loock *et al.* (2009:3), one of the most important characteristics of a system is its ability to maintain a steady state. The latter is, however, not a motionless or true static balance. It is a dynamic balance that maintains itself by means of continuous movement and, hence, it is known as a dynamic equilibrium (*cf.* 1.3). Pilon (2003:3) cautions that small inputs in systems that are far from equilibrium can, conversely, trigger massive consequences. The moment hindering forces such as vandalism (bringing instability – disturbing the equilibrium) occur, countering driving forces must be instituted to rebalance the system (bringing stability – restoring the equilibrium). If schools are, consequently, to exist in a state of dynamic equilibrium, there need to be forces

tending towards consonance or order for all forces tending towards dissonance or disorder (*cf.* 3.2.3 & 3.4).

In order to maintain equilibrium and stability at schools and counter the dissonance caused by an ever-changing environment (*cf.* 1.2), both the individual and the organization need to contribute to the establishment of an effective individual-organizational relationship (Loock *et al.*, 2009:7). With specific reference to education in which learners are treated as passive receivers of information, Freire (1993:59-60) points out that such learners suffer since they feel dehumanized, their efforts to act are frustrated and they find themselves unable to use their own faculties. This suffering is, according to the same author, rooted in the fact that the human equilibrium has been disturbed. In order to restore their capacity to act and to liberate themselves, they often submit to and identify themselves with persons or groups, such as vandals, having power (*cf.* 3.4.2).

In adapting to its environment, systems will attempt to cope with external forces by acquiring control over them. Social systems will move towards incorporating external resources (management and organizational resources) essential for their survival and, as a consequence, expanding the original system (Loock *et al.*, 2009:4; *cf.* 3.3).

Kirsten *et al.* (2009:3; *cf.*, 3.2.1), similarly, show that a system regulates itself through a series of feedback loops. Feedback loops travel back and forth within the system in order to provide stability, equilibrium and homeostasis for the person as a living being. The constitutive parts are, thus, constantly changing in order to keep the human being balanced, as disturbances, according to Guskey (2000:33; *cf.* 1.3), affect the ability of the whole system to recover its equilibrium and sustain it.

With specific references to schools, Bronfenbrenner (1986:726) opines that ecological principles can be successfully applied in creating sustainable learning communities and school organizations, while Guskey (2000:19) states that they

provide a useful theoretical framework for research on the implementation of strategic governance and management at schools. In this regard, Pilon (2003:3) stresses that sustainability cannot be pursued within prevailing development strategies, which ignore, underestimate and undermine values and environments essential to a healthy human development. Against this background, and since schools can be regarded as being systems, this research endeavours to apply an ecosystemic theory in addressing the issue of transforming South African schools in order to combat school vandalism successfully (Freiberg,1999:16).

To obtain knowledge on the reasons why learners become vandals, it is essential to study child development, which will forthwith be addressed.

2.2.2 Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development

In understanding child development, the ecological model by Bronfenbrenner (1986:745; *cf.* 2.1) proposes the following four interacting dimensions to be considered:

- personal factors such as a child or parent's temperament;
- process factors, referring, *inter alia*, to interactions occurring within a family;
- contexts, which include schools, families and local communities; as well as
- time, referring to changes within the child or in the environment over a period of time.

These interacting dimensions are important as Bronfenbrenner (1986:746; *cf.* 1.3) shows that the effects of proximal interactions occurring through face-to-face, long-term relationships (between a mother and child, or a child and a close friend) essentially shape lasting aspects of development. The process of proximal interaction are, in turn, affected by personal factors (for example, the temperament of the child), as well as by the nature of the context within which they occur. Eloff and Ebersöhn (2001:152) point out that there is no doubt that the quality of the environment - in which young children spend their early years - is a critical influence in their capacity to develop an adequate foundation for

learning later on in their lives. Prinsloo (2006:306, *cf*. 3.2.3) concurrently contents that schools are supposed to be safe places where all learners have equal access to equal educational opportunities and are treated equally. In this regard, attention must also be drawn to the fact that personal as well as contextual factors are continuously being altered as the child grows older.

In line with the above, Cloete and Buntings (1999:19) emphasize that an ecosystemic theory entails a study of human development while focusing on the interrelated structures and processes among four nested systems, namely, the micro-, meso-, exo- (these three systems describe the functioning of a totally integrated person) and macro-systems that differ in their closeness to the development of human beings. All these systems interact within the chrono-system (the last two systems describe the total living and non-living physical realities as well as the symbolic or abstract realities – the interpersonal element of human interaction or the external environment – in which a person finds him/herself) as illustrated in figure 1.2. Bronfenbrenner (2004) explains that the micro-, meso- and macro-systems are complex *layers* of the environment structure, each having an effect on human development.

In emphasizing the importance of these systems, Pilon (2003:1) points out that the world's widespread problems can never be sorted out by segmented projects, which ignores micro-, meso- and macro-relationships. All the contexts or domains are holistically involved in the life of the human being, and they are in constant intra- and interaction (Kirsten *et al.,* 2009:3). Such a theory thus encompasses a scientific study of the progressive, mutual accommodation as well as a lifelong interaction between active and growing human beings on the one side and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which they live on the other side.

Kirsten *et al.* (2009:3) caution that, although these contextual systems are distinguishable, they remain inseparable. Consequently, when one of these contexts is lost or separated from the others, death will follow. The latter is

underscored by Steyn *et al.* (2010:171) who explain that the functioning of the whole is totally dependent on the interaction between the parts and *vice versa*. Existence without some or other environment is, thus, inconceivable. In this regard, Freire (1993:1) contends that the liberation of humans is not a gift, nor a self-achievement, but a mutual process.

As such, an ecosystemic model can be employed as a point of departure to study school vandalism as it considers factors in the immediate environment of learners and educators, as well as the mutual interaction between these factors (Steyn *et al.*, 2010:169), affecting the well-being of both. Learner well-being, in line with this, regarded by Van Petegen *et al.* (2008:452; *cf.* 1.2) as *a positive emotional state that is the result of a harmony between the sums of specific context factors on the one hand and the personal needs and expectations towards the school on the other hand.*
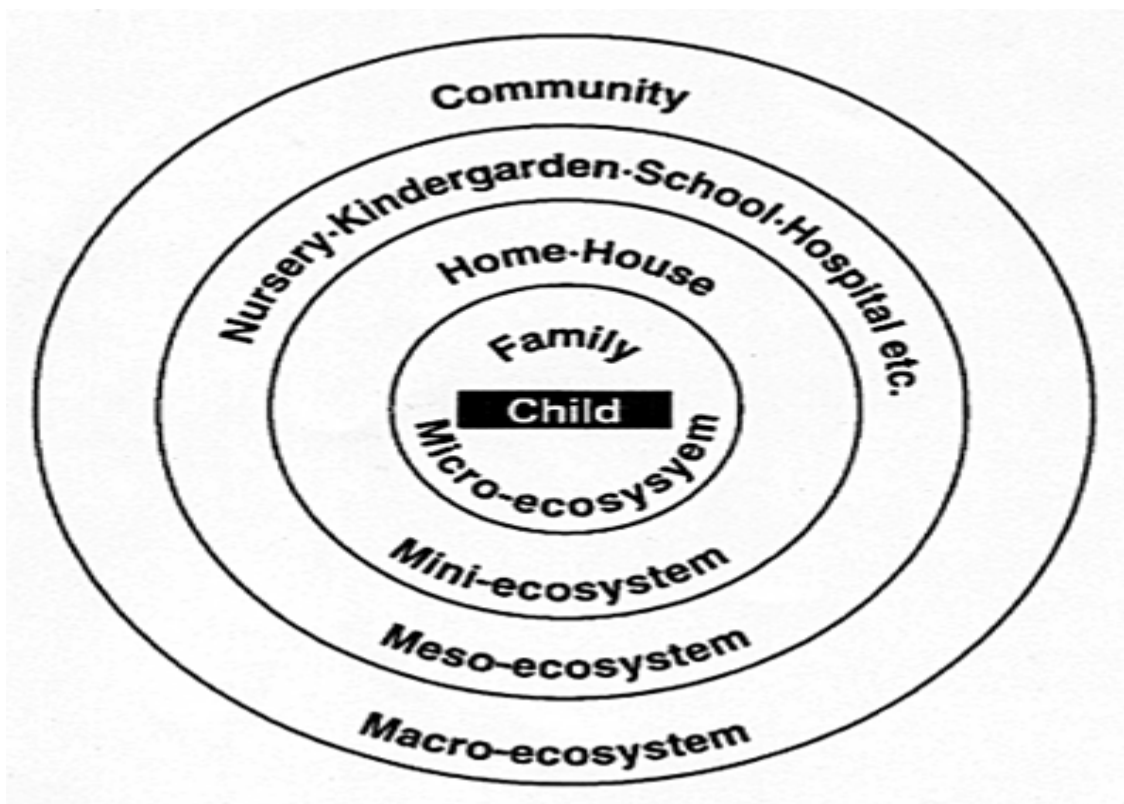
Figure 1.2: Bronfenbrenner's theory of an eco system

In casting more light on the theory of an ecosystem, the different nested systems will be discussed individually.

2.2.2.1 The micro-system

The micro-system, lying at the heart of the ecosystem, includes the family, school and peer groups. As such, it provides a child with continuous face-to face interactions with familiar people to whom he/she is closely linked. Micro-systems involve patterns of daily activities, roles and relationships, allowing for key proximal actions to occur (Kelly, 1998:66).

The micro-ecosystem consists of the space or the world in which a child can assess him/herself or grasp through the sensory system and through interactive processes with other human beings. This constitutes the individual network immediately adjoining the child. In the case of an infant, it compounds of interactive personal and direct relationships with mainly the parents, and later, with brothers and sisters as well as the grandparents and others within the extended family (the mini-ecosystem). This system is, however, not only made up by human relations, but also includes broader aspects such as housing structure and sanitation (Kobayashi, 1993:27; *cf.* 3.2.1).

In taking cognisance of this system, including close relationships such as those with family, friends, intimate partners and peers, Nel (2006:21) opines that it can be explored how these relationships increase the risk of being a victim or perpetrator of violence. In youth violence, for example, having friends or being part of gangs, engaging in or encouraging violence may increase a young person's risk.

2.2.2.2 The meso-system

The meso-system encompasses the interrelations of two or more settings in which the developing human being actively participates and thus represents the interconnections between the different micro-systems (McWhirter *et al.*, 2004:21). The meso-system, therefore, functions as a connecting link, which; for

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the young child; includes nursery schools and/or crèches, all of importance to them. As such, this system supports the transition of children from the family into society as they grow and develop (Kobayashi, 1993:27; *cf.* 3.5). For a child, this would also, as pointed out by McWhirter *et al.* (2004:21), refer to the relations between homes, school and neighbourhood peer groups. While taking the fact that the degree of influence of these ecosystems on children changes as they grow *older*, the ecological model assumes that the individual's development is enhanced if the meso-system is consistent and positive

Risks factors at this level may be influenced by factors such as residential mobility (for example, whether people in a neighborhood tend to stay for a long time or move frequently), population density, high levels of unemployment or the existence of a local drug trade (Nel, 2006:21). Risk factors, including ecological ones, are defined by Kobayashi (1993:28) as agents or conditions which increase the possibility or frequency of current and future problems, hazards, handicaps or even diseases of the body and the mind of a given child in a certain group, particularly in respects of growth and development.

Although the researcher acknowledges that risk factors can be grouped into genetic and non-genetic factors, emphasis – for the scope of this study – will only be placed on non-generic risk factors which are generally ecological in nature and to whom everybody is continuously exposed to *in utero* wherever they live (Kobayashi, 1993:28). Emphasis is, moreover, only placed on the collaboration between multiple risk factors and not on single ecological factors, seeing that a combination of ecological factors can become risk factors causing specific social problems. It is, in addition, realized that socio-cultural factors very often play a key role in causing social problems, together with other ecological factors.

2.2.2.3 The exo-system

In contrast to the micro- and meso-systems, where the child is an active participant, the exo-system consists of settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant. Although not being directly involved, events

occurring in this system, nevertheless, indirectly affect or are affected by what is happening in the setting containing the developing person (Garmston & Bruce, 2004:33; McWhirter *et al.,* 2004:21).

2.2.2.4 The macro-system

As the outer circle, the macro-system encircles the micro-, meso- and exo-systems while having a significant impact on these systems (Steyn *et al.,* 2010:171). The macro-system is defined by Kelly (1998:43) as *consistencies in the form and content of lower-order systems that exist at the level of the subculture or the culture as the whole, along with any belief system or ideology underlying such consistencies.* Becta (2001:21), similarly, indicates that all settings, at each level, operate within a cultural context.

The macro-system, consisting of social values, politics, society, health and economics has a tremendous influence on adolescents' views on their personal futures as well as on their emerging identities, thus their total development (Flanagan & Botcheva, quoted by Steyn *et al.,* 2010:174). For the purpose of this study, this system is of importance as it includes the attitudes, beliefs, values and ideologies inherent in a school community and its culture.

Community or neighbourhood variables on a macro-level, however, include risk factors such as economic inequality and relative deprivation incorporating aspects such as unemployment, community disorganization, the availability of substances (drugs and alcohol), pro-criminal attitudes, beliefs and criminal involvement, a climate of violence as well as governmental role players themselves disregarding the law (Maree, 2008:57-58; *cf.* 3.2.2). As such, prevailing circumstances in South Africa could have a significant negative impact on adolescent development, behaviour and future expectations.

The macro-level, according to Nel (2006:21; *cf.* 3.2.2), considers the broad societal factors that help create a climate in which violence is encouraged or inhibited. Larger societal factors include, among others, the health, economic,

educational and social policies that help to maintain economic or social inequality between groups in society. The same author also refers to the fact that the constitutional and legislative environment of South Africa appears to be highly conducive to addressing violence, with a Bill of Rights containing an explicit guarantee of the right to be free from all forms of violence from either public or private sources.

2.2.2.5 The chrono-system

This system encompasses the dimension of time as it relates to a child's environment. Elements within this system can be either external, such as the timing of a parent's death or internal, such as the physiological changes that occur with the ageing of a child (Brown & Dornbush, 2003:28). As children grow older, they react differently to environmental changes as they are more mature and thus, able to determine the influence that changes may have on them (Smocker, 1999:23).

2.3 DYNAMIC DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

Dhar and Stein (1997:44) maintain that an ecological perspective focuses on dynamic developmental processes, including the way in which stress, the ability to cope and adapt contribute to development. Freire (1993:14), however, cautions that the world to which humans relate is not a static and closed order, a given reality which they must accept or adjust to, but rather a problem to be, progressively, worked on and solved. A useful concept for understanding such a view on development is the *goodness of fit* model. This model suggests, as pointed out by Van Wyk (1998:12), that healthy development and effective functioning depend on the match between the needs and resources of a child or family and the demands, support and resources offered by the surrounding environment. The developing individual responds to the *environmental fit* through developmental processes associated with stress management, as well as coping and adaptation strategies. Freire (1993:57) is of the opinion that the well educated individual is an adapted person, since he/she is better *fit* for the world.

Beck (2000:80) postulates that the *goodness of fit model* is also useful for understanding how to support and strengthen families. Families develop and move through predictable developmental stages just as children do. Families must also respond to the demands and expectations from work, social groups, community institutions and society as a whole. Wenglinsky (2000:15) argues that stress builds up when the resources and coping skills of a family, *inter alia,* are inadequate to meet the demands and expectations of the social environment. Family stress levels are a predictor of rotten outcomes for children seeing that a family's ability to nurture its children decreases when stress increases beyond a certain point (Castells, 1998:18).

According to Telem (2001:651), a lack of fit or mismatch can occur between children and their family or school environment and between a family and the community environment. Problem behaviour at schools may often be attributed to a mismatch between a child and the expectations of the school setting (*cf.* 3.4.3). Hartshorne (1999:37) adds that mismatches also occur when the home culture and values are at odds with the dominant values and culture of the school environment. This poses a threat to the linkages between family and school. Fullan (2000:94) shows that such a threat can be lessened if both sides are carefully respectful and recognize the importance and value of each to the child. In this regard Freire (1993:14; *cf.* 3.2.3.2) makes it clear that people should educate one another through the mediation of the world. When a mismatch occurs and a child is disruptive or a family needs outside help, it may, as cautioned by Fullan (2000:94; *cf.* 3.2.2), not be due to a deficiency in the child or family itself, but rather the result of a lack of resources or support from the social environment.

Emanating from the above, it can be inferred that the environment either assists or hinders human development. A given environment may, for example, be either bountiful and supportive of development or impoverished and threatening to development (Van der Westhuizen & Maree, 2009:47). In this regard, Lyons (2000:70) stresses that negative elements or the absence of opportunities in the

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family, school or community environment may compromise the healthy development of children or inhibit effective family functioning. Without the necessary opportunities, Kapp (2006:117) indicates that a child's life experiences will remain poor, resulting in his/her mentally functioning at a lower level than that of which he/she is capable of. Maree (2008:55), similarly, indicates that the quality of human life (the happiness of its citizens, which includes how well society functions and maintains itself) involves life chances (opportunities) and life results (outcomes). The same author cautions that, although many people make much of their lives despite poor opportunities, the opposite is also true.

As children move out into the world, their growth is directly influenced by a number of important aspects, such as:

- the expectations and challenges posed to them by peer group members, care-givers, schools, and other social settings (Sweeney, 2003:45),
- the depth and quality of a family's social network as a predictor of healthy family functioning; (During normal family transitions, all families experience stress. Just having someone to talk to, swap child care or offer help with projects can buffer a family against the stress of normal life (Flecknoe, 2001:19)
- strong linkages between families and community organizations such as schools and open channels that allow vital information and resources to flow in both directions, support families, school, and communities (Kraak & Nissar, 2001:20); and
- the work environment, community attitudes and values, and the large society, shaping child development indirectly, but powerful, by affecting the way a family functions (Brown, 1999:137).

Bird and Elliot (1996:129) point out that, when the ecology of a particular child is considered, the challenges and opportunities posed to that child by different settings might be assessed by addressing the following questions:

- In settings where the child has face-to-face contact with others, such as within the family, church and the school, during interactions with peer group members: Is the child accepted? Is the child reinforced for competent behaviour? Is he/she exposed to enough diversity regarding different roles and relationships? Is the child given an active role to play in reciprocal relationships? (Jordaan & Jordaan, 1998:21)

- When the different settings of a child's ecology such as home-school, home-church, school-neighbourhood interact, it must, as set forward by Hess and Frederick (1998:14), be questioned whether the different settings respect one another, and whether they present basic consistency with regard to values. It is also important to establish whether communication channels exist between the settings and whether an attitude of openness towards collaboration and partnerships exist.

Within the ambit of the dynamic development processes of a child's development, Joubert (2008b:118) emphasizes that any suitable explanation of the South African youth's behaviour should take the behavioural development of the youth and the varying influences they are subjected to into account, while providing an integrated explanation incorporating psychological and social variables. This may be a daunting task, particularly when one considers the disruptive (risk) factors prevailing in South Africa's society at large. Risk factors refer to things within an individual's person characteristics or environment that increase the probability of violent behaviour (Maree, 2008:56).

Figure 1.3 The ecosystem of networks

In order to explain school vandalism as anti-social behaviour among learners, a systemic way of thinking is essential.

2.4 SYSTEMIC THINKING

The system theory, as a whole, entails a new way of seeing the world and a new way of thinking, known as *systems-thinking* or *systemic thinking*. The latter implies, as stated by Lafee (2002:12), thinking in terms of relationships, connectedness and context to, according to Steyn *et al.* (2010:171), explain mutual relationships between people, communities and institutions.

Cloete and Buntings (1999:19; *cf.* 1.3) argue that, to understand the lessons of eco-systems and apply them to human communities, there is a need to learn the principles of ecology, the language of nature and to become ecologically literate. Emphasis on the whole is referred to by the same authors as holistic thinking or organism-thinking, since organisms are but one of the main manifestations of living. Epstein (2002:30), on the other hand, refers to it as ecological thinking,

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seeing that ecology entails a study of living communities to which this kind of thinking applies.

Systemic thinking originated during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Around the 1930s and onwards, the holistic perspective became known as being systemic and, therefore, as systemic-thinking (Stoll & Fink, 1996:21).

Systems-thinking emerged simultaneously in several disciplines. This type of thinking was pioneered by biologists who studied organism biology, and who emphasized the view that living organisms, as integrated whole properties, cannot be reduced to their smaller parts (Lafee, 2002:46). System-thinking was enriched by psychologists in the new school of Gestalt- an organic form – psychology. Psychologists discovered that living organisms do not perceive the world in terms of isolated elements, but rather as integrated perceptual patterns. The meaningful organized whole, thus, exhibit qualities that are absent in their parts. The famous saying that the whole is more than the sum of its parts was coined by the Gestalt psychologists (Joyce & Beverly, 2002:11).

The third discipline, in which systems-thinking emerged, was ecology (Freedman, 2001:106). While focusing on the study of animals and plant communities, networks of relationships - the web of life - were observed. In line with this, ecologists placed emphasis on the irreducible wholeness of a phenomenon.

Physics also discovered that the world cannot be decomposed into independent existing elementary units (Venezky & Davis, 2002:40). In the field of physics, where attention is shifted from macroscopic objects to atoms and sub-atomic particles, it was soon recognized that nature does not consist of isolated building blocks, but rather appears as a complex web of relationships between the various parts of a unified whole.

By the 1930s most of the key characteristics of systems-thinking had been formulated by organism biologists, gestalt psychologists and ecologists (Robb,

2002:57). Such a theory can, according to the researcher, therefore, be effective in assisting school governors and managers to view the relationships, connectedness and social context between families, community agencies and societal structures in understanding and dealing with school vandalism. The latter will, in turn, lead to rectifying learner behaviour since, as postulated by Freire (1993:14), individuals can – with the proper tools - gradually perceive personal and social reality, as well as the contradictions in it, become conscious of his/her own perception of that reality, and deal critically with it.

2.5 SUMMARY

Within the ambit of data obtained by way of an in-depth literature study on an encosystemic model and –theory (*cf.* 2.2 & 2.2.1), the four nested systems, namely the micro- (*cf.* 2.2.2.1), meso- (*cf.* 2.2.2.2), exo- (*cf.* 2.2.2.3) and macro-systems (*cf.* 2.2.2.4) as well as their inter-connectedness with regard to the development of human beings (*cf.* 2.3), were addressed in this chapter.

The dynamic processes of child development in line with Bronfenbrenner's ecological model of child development (*cf.* 2.2.2) were discussed with the aim of emphasising the necessity of humans to adapt to changes in their environment and, concomitantly, to be able to adjust their behaviour.

Systemic thinking, as a way of taking cognisance of a holistic view to solving social phenomena, was also explained (*cf.* 2.4).

In employing the data presented in this chapter, the next chapter addresses acts of vandalism in schools within such an ecosystemic framework.

CHAPTER 3

SCHOOL VANDALISM WITHIN AN ECOSYSTEMIC FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented important background information on an ecosystemic model, -theory and way of thinking. In collaboration with and in extending the data presented in chapter two to acts of vandalism in schools, this chapter sets out to explain the different environmental systems children experience on their journey to adulthood.

The family, community and schools; as ecological systems; are discussed in detail with reference to their composure, different elements and influences on the child, as developing human beings. With regards to schools, the important roles of the principal, educator and parents are outlined. The application of an ecosystemic theory, as discussed in chapter two, to school and community interventions are, in addition, referred to.

A thorough review of literature on vandalism at schools was conducted in order to demonstrate its social contents and the underlying assumptions regarding school vandalism in order to redefine the research questions (Delport & Fouché, 2009:263). The aim was to define vandalism, describe its causes and impact and to review the effect of vandalism on teaching and learning. Theory reviewed this way was used to guide the study in an explanatory way (before data collection) (Delport & Fouché, 2009:265).

A theoretical ecosystemic framework on vandalism, as a societal phenomenon, is important to examine the multiple effects and interrelatedness of vandalism in school environments since no single force or cause can directly be identified that drives children to become vandals (Maree, 2008:56; *cf.* 1.2 & 2.3).

Guskey (2000:19) emphasises that school vandalism throughout the world has led, not only to the debilitation of psycho-spiritual well-being, but also to adversely affecting the social, economic and cultural systems of societies. Kelly (2002:3) and Leoschut (2007:37), concurrently, contend that school vandalism impacts negatively on both the human resources of schools (learners, educators, non-teaching and departmental staff, parents and the community), and various aspects of the education system including demand, quality, content and planning (*cf.* 1.1).

With the aim of addressing school vandalism with a theoretical ecosystemic framework in mind, attention will firstly be drawn to an ecosystemic model and, secondly, to vandalism *per se.*

3.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SYSTEMS CHILDREN EXPERIENCE

As children grow-up, they are influenced by various environments of which the most important ones are the family, school and direct community environments. In this study focus is placed on how these different systems influence one another and how factors within them produce behavioural difficulties. Karcher (2004:7) accentuates the fact that children should be assisted in establishing a balance of connectedness to school, family and friends as it will help them to become less likely to engage in any violent behaviour. As each of these environmental systems present different challenges and opportunities to children and includes different risk factors, (Maree, 2008:57) they will be discussed separately.

3.2.1 The family as a system

Families (consisting of the father, mother and their children) are the first and primary social unit (micro-system; *cf.* 2.2.2.1) within which an individual usually interacts (Maree, 2008:62). Parents, as caregivers, are needed to provide a haven of security and affection, to shoulder the responsibility of taking care and nurture, to lead an example and to instil basic values regarding acceptable social

behaviour (Olivier *et al.*, 2003:378). With specific reference to South Africa's conditions, a family refers to *individuals who either by contract or agreement choose to live together intimately and function as a unit, a social and economic system* (DoE, 1997:93).

It is within the family unit that happy reciprocal dialogue must take place to form the basis of mutual respect (Kapp, 2006:115) for one another and for each other's possessions. The importance of the family in socialising with young people, teaching them the rules of behaviour in society and taking the appropriate steps to keep them within these rules can, according to Maree (2008:62), not be overemphasized.

Parents (custodial and non-custodial parents) need to be involved in their children's lives, and be supportive of them by providing advice, emotional support, adequate attention and fair discipline (Theron & Dunn, 2010:238; *cf.* 2.2.1). Despite many reporting that children feel that they do not need the support from their parents, the participants (children) to research conducted by Bender and Emslie (2010:56), explicitly expressed their need for the support and guidance of their parents in withstanding peer and societal pressures that can result in their acting in aggressive or violent ways at school.

Burton (2008:18), similarly, accentuates the fact that behaviour, attitudes and examples portrayed by parents, caregivers, and other adults in the family have a profound impact on learners' academic development and performance, their social attitudes, behaviour, and responses within schools.

The family environment has, however, been identified by Wicks-Nelson and Israel (2000:199) as the principal arena for the learning of aggressive behaviour. Ladson-Billings (1999:67) maintains that societies have, increasingly, seen a breakdown in the structures of a child's meso-system. Kapp (2006:115; *cf.* 1.2), in support, shows that behavioural disturbances can often be traced to the child's educational situation at home, while Joubert (2008b:119) points out that the basic care of children in families are an expanding problem in South Africa.

Bach and Louw (2010:26), for instance, also contend that children who were both victims and witnesses of, *inter alia*, domestic violence are at a significantly higher risk of developing depression, separation anxiety, post traumatic stress, and oppositional defiant behaviour. Familial factors can therefore influence whether a child develops depression after being exposed to vandalism at schools or becoming directly involved in such behaviour. In line with the latter, Burton (2008:18) explains that more than one third of the learners in both primary and secondary schools, who have been fenceless to violence at home, have been victims of violence at school, as opposed to less than one fifth of learners who had not been exposed to violence in the home. This relationship shows not only that young people are surrounded by violence in all their spheres of life, but also suggests a complex relationship between victimization in different environments, with a vulnerability to ill-treatment common within a range of different environments.

In this regard, Gorman-Smith and Tolan (1993:115) contend that low family cohesion is related to an increase in the prevalence of psychological distress among the youth exposed to violence, while Martinez and Richters (1993:27) indicate that children who were victims or witnesses of violent events involving family members and those familiar to them, were more inclined to report symptoms of distress and depression than incidents in the case of involving strangers. Bach and Louw (2010:26), additionally, found that children who were exposed to violence within their homes experience a greater degree of distress after exposure to violence at schools than those coming from non violent homes.In the absence of well functioning families, children are exposed to learn anti-social behaviour (behaviour is learned) and, thus, come into conflict with the law (Maree, 2008:62).

Joubert (2008b:119), incidentally, emphasizes that the disintegration of family life in South Africa cannot be ignored. Serious problems such as the death of parents owing to AIDS, incarcerated parents and emotional, physical or sexual abuse by parents and family members flourish. AIDS-orphaned children are left

without care. Others are left alone by parents seeking employment, awaiting trial or serving a prison sentence. The high rate of teenage pregnancies where the father usually, and sometimes even the mother, does not want to take responsibility for their children, or the young mother (incomplete family) has to provide for them alone, adds to this problem (McWhirter *et al.*, 2004:141).

To cope with challenges such as the above, Theron and Dunn (2010:236) refer to various strategies assisting adolescents, such as reframing their parent's problems positively by finding some benefit in what is happening and, consequently, improving their home circumstances and lessening the occurrence of conflict in this sphere. Children can also be assisted in accepting their individual circumstances by acknowledging that others have similar problems, that they are not the cause thereof, and that they can talk freely about their problems (Theron & Dunn, 2010:237).

Despite the fact that South Africa succeeded in obtaining more political stability and improving social services over the past 16 years (since 1994), poverty and economic inequalities persist due to, as set forward by Prinsloo (2004:159), the fact that the financial status of families heavily depends on access to well remunerated employment. The same author opines that poverty has increased to such an extent as to make it nearly impossible for the State to solve the problem for its people in terms of providing employment opportunities, housing, health care and education for all. As a result, the majority of children and adolescents live in households whose annual income falls below the poverty level (Ladson-Billings, 1999:67). Increasing numbers of hours worked outside the home by both mothers and fathers imply that they have less time to spend being involved in their child and adolescent's development (Collins, 2002:67). Owing to the absence of parents, children loiter unprotected on the streets and are subject to negative influences. Without care, they will feel insecure and the accompanying anxiety will create a multitude of possibilities for behavioural disturbances (Kapp, 2006:115).

Aggression and violence within households are also occurring with alarming frequency, leading to the development of severe anti-social (criminal) behaviour among children exposed to it (McWhirter *et al.*, 2004:158; Maree, 2008:65). Drug and alcohol abuse by caregivers, similarly, sets poor examples for children in their formative years (Joubert, 2008b:119). In this regard, Nel (2009:19) avows that it goes without saying that children are abused and neglected by their parents or other caregivers everywhere in the world.

Research conducted by Prinsloo (1998:19), moreover, found that parents report on an ever increasing and uncrossable cleft between them and their children. The reason for the latter being, that children are increasingly becoming aware of their human rights without recognising their concomitant responsibilities. Children are incited by a general spirit of materialism and an urge for more money (dominant values of globalization) while no emphasis is placed on important human values such as integrity, honesty, diligence and respect for the lives and property of others. In recognising the importance of the latter, Makgotho (2007:9) points out that if children expect others to respect their rights they need to be well behaved, respectful and honest towards themselves, as well as to the people surrounding them.

In the modern poverty stricken world in which all compete for resources just to survive, Weeks (2009:3; *cf*. 1.3) contends that people are isolated and pitted against each other rather that brought together in a closer circle. It also appears as if their ideas about a good life do not add up to a fulfilling life. The quality of life has thus become confused with their standard of living.

The family members are, however, not the only ones to blame for providing poor family units for children to grow up in, as the environments families encounter also contribute to child development due to their impact on the functioning of families (Cox, 1997:56). Underscoring the latter, Bester (2007:176) indicates that it often happens that children born to the same parents develop dissimilar personalities. These differences are attributes to non-shared environments

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outside the family system. The peer group or school could be some non-shared environments. Harris (quoted by Bester, 2007:176-178), concurrently, argues that children's personalities are largely influenced by their conduct outside the home, as they consider the feedback they receive from others as more important. Theron and Dunn (2010:238), in conjunction, show that friends are dominant sources of support.

Rejection by peers, to the contrary, could have a detrimental effect on a child's self-esteem and social adjustment. Continuous emotional support from parents could, however, assist a child to overcome such problems as quality parent-child relationships are an important predictor of the adolescent's psychological well-being and his/her adjustment to the outside world (Bester, 2007:179). With regard to influences by peer groups, Joubert (2008b:119) stresses that when peer influences become stronger, loving and consistent discipline of parents should remain to reinforce positive values and support socially acceptable behaviour.

Research done by Bester (2007:188), indicates that peer relationships are a more important factor than relationships with parents in the personality development of adolescents. Many parents, who feel that their parental role is disrespected, would view the peer group as a threat and consequently prevent their children from participating in peer group activities. This could, however, have negative consequences for the child's social and personality development, since they must also learn how to behave socially with others in an acceptable manner. Although peer groups may, thus, have a negative influence on one another, they also have a supportive role to play (Bester, 2007:189).

With reference to the environment at large, Maree (2008:62) stresses that families need certain resources (social networks) and relationships within their community (Comber, 2002:98) to function optimally. Families are, thus, affected by the manner in which community organizations are responsive to their needs (Newman *et.al.,* 1999:65). Within its community setting, each family fabricates its

own web of support from the formal and informal resources available (Becta, 1998:43). Different environments, however, offer different challenges and opportunities.

According to James (2000:85), rural families have fewer employment and educational opportunities, encounter lower economic well-being and have less access to health care and social services. Urban families, on the other hand, are faced with higher crime rates, are more impersonalized and experience higher density and noisier living conditions. The environment may, as pointed out by Morris (2001:87), promote or hinder family functioning and, subsequently, child development. Families confronted by the occurrence of high amounts of violence often respond by withdrawing themselves emotionally which, in turn, impedes the normal development of children within such families.

Whelan (2000:66) emphasizes the fact that the relationship between families and their community changes and evolves over time. As a result, the needs and interests of family members changes from time to time.

While there are critics of this conceptualization, most researchers now approach the family from what could be loosely called a *systems-perspective* (Lafee, 2002:43). Cloete and Buntings (1999:23) confirm that a systems approach to human development considers the way relationships within the family and social environment influence the individual development and family functioning.

The systems-theory has guiding principles that apply to all kinds of systems including business and industry, community organizations, schools and families. These principles are helpful in understanding how families function and how families and communities interact (Miller & Harrington, 2000:227). Some principles of systems relevant to a family-centred approach are:

Interdependence- Parts of the system cannot be understood in isolation. Children cannot be understood outside the context of their families. Any description of a child has to consider the two-way patterns of interaction within

that child's family and its social environment. Describing individual family members does not describe the family system, from which can be deduced that a family is more than the sum of its parts (Epstein, 2002:28).

Sub-systems- All systems are made up of sub-systems. Family sub-systems include a spousal sub-system, parent-child sub-system and sibling sub-system. Family's roles and functions are defined by its sub-systems (Stoll & Fink, 1996:21).

Circularity- Every member of a system influences every other member in a circular chain reaction. A family system is constantly changing as children develop, thus it is almost impossible to know for certain the direct causes of behaviour (Epstein, 2002:66; *cf.*1.2 & 2.1).

Inquilinity- The same event leads to different outcomes and a given outcome may result from different events. What this suggests is that there are many paths to healthy development and there is no one-best-way to raise children (Chall, 2000:16).

Communication- All behaviour is viewed as interpersonal messages that contain both factual and relationship information (Telem, 2001:88).

Family rules- Rules operate as norms within a family and serve to organize family interaction (Sweeney, 2003:61).

Homeostasis- A steady, stable state is maintained in the ongoing interaction system through the use of family norms and a mutually reinforcing feedback loop (Sammons *et al.,* 2000:915; *cf.*, 2.2.1).

Morphogenesis- Families also require flexibility to adapt to internal and external change (La Grange, 2002:23).

An individual's experiences, interaction and behaviour must, therefore, be understood by taking cognizance of the influence his/her surrounding environment has on him/her. In the same manner, it must be recognized that a

family does not live in isolation, but exists within the broader context of the society.
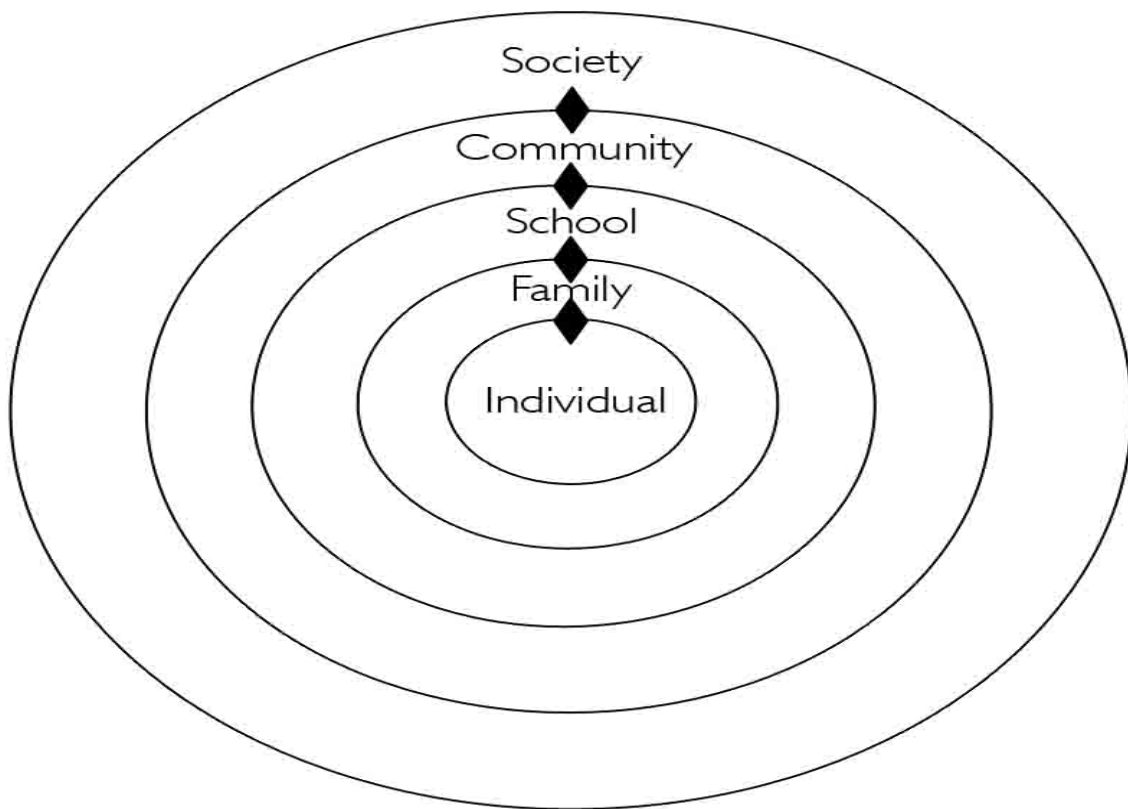
Figure 1.4 An example of interacting levels of organization in social context

3.2.2 The community as a system

The involvement of the structures in a child's meso-system is meant to provide adult relationships as required for positive development. The bio-ecological systems theory of Bronfenbrenner (1997:56; *cf.* 2.2.2) holds that these direct (face-to-face) relationships form the foundation of a child's cognitive and emotional growth.

Ginsbreg *et al.* (2001:99) maintain that communities should provide parents with access to people with similar concerns that can function as resources and emotional support. Communities should also provide child care, parent employment and programmes designed to encourage interaction among families.

Partnership between community agencies, businesses and industry will provide invaluable resources for families. Since communities have always been an important influence on children, more assistance from the community is needed in order to ensure children and adolescents' success in academics, as well as in life (Olivier *et al.*, 2003:379).

The current advanced technological society is, to the contrary, as pointed out by Freire (1993:15), rapidly making objects of humans and subtly programming humans into conformity to the logic of its system and submerging them into a new culture of silence. Prinsloo (2004:164) concurrently refers to a growing discourse with regard to *human capital* as more and more emphasis is placed on the importance of materialism than on humans. The value of education is, for example, now being assessed by way of economic criteria – the extent to which it reacts to market needs and can lead to economic growth. As such, learners are increasingly being seen as economic investments (products) instead of human beings in need of being holistically developed (SA, 2000:35). Flowing from the latter, a decline in or total absence of moral and social values, respect and responsibility are experienced.

In this regard, Moore *et al.* (2003:252) point out that rapid social changes- the transformation of culture and social institutions over time - within communities (either positive or negative) have been found to create instability, which in turn could produce acts of vandalism. South Africa with its multicultural society consisting of overwhelming and diverse values and lifestyles presents even more challenges. Since socially constructed practices embedded within a given culture provide protective resources (buffers) in the form of religious faith, cultural tolerance and life philosophies on acceptable behavioural patterns to adolescents, their importance cannot be overemphasized. Underscoring the latter, Theron and Dunn's (2010:239) research findings indicate that religious faith as regarded by the youth is a prominent pillar enabling them to cope with life's challenges and overcome existing problems.

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In South Africa, specifically, Prinsloo (2006:178) shows that socio-cultural structures have also changed due to the movement towards a democracy. These, in turn have had an effect on educational policies along with numerous other changes. Some of the changes include an increase in unemployment (from 31,5% in 1994 to 37,6% in 2000), changes within family structures and the growth of social exclusion. With specific reference to democracy, Smith (2009:9) opines that South Africa still has a long road to follow to achieve full democracy as the latter does not imply burning tires and vandalism, but rather clear and well thought through decisions.

However, the fact that changes within society have been found to have a huge impact on education and on the children attending schools, is not always realised. Prinsloo (2006:178) also highlights that South Africa, as a developing country, experiences a growing rate of poverty leading to individuals being unable to afford the cost of education, and structural adjustment policies have generally lowered the quality of education. The vicious cycle created by unemployment, as set out by the same author (2006:179), also impacts negatively on education as it is realized by all that higher education levels do not necessarily lead to more and/or better job opportunities. In support, Saunderson and Oswald (2009:155), show that learners become despondent and question the value of education, as future possibilities are not guaranteed.

The effective support children are entitled to are, *inter alia*, impacted negatively in South Africa due to the prevalence of socio-economic factors such as poverty, unemployment and high levels of illiteracy, urbanization and HIV/Aids (Eloff & Ebersöhn, 2001:153). Poverty, specifically, provides an inadequate frame of reference for socially acceptable and moral behaviour (Joubert, 2008b:119) as unemployed parents cannot provide the role models of social and professional success with which their children can identify (Maree, 2008:59). Due to the negative economic experiences in South Africa already mentioned, parents become extremely negative which, in turn, creates negative attitudes toward schools, education in general and their future expectations in particular

(Saunderson & Oswald, 2009:155). Prinsloo (2004:158) moreover outlines that education in poverty-stricken communities in South Africa (of which Sebokeng is but one) is hampered by, *inter alia,* a lack of order in community structures, vandalism, negative peer group influences and an environment without intellectual stimulation.

Poverty *per se* does, according to Maree (2008:58), however not lead to crime, but rather to how people experience their financial situation within their social environment. In line with this, Freire (1993:55) posits that the focus should be placed on changing the consciousness of the oppressed (so that they can become beings for themselves) and not on the situation which oppresses them. This is, unfortunately, as outlined by Prinsloo (2004:160), no easy task since poverty manifests itself in negative factors such as poor health, malnutrition, deprived benefits, educational backlogs, communities without support, communication and language barriers and limited social status, leaving its inhabitants vulnerable, powerless and isolated.

Economic strain and relative deprivation are, nevertheless, universally accepted as factors contributing to crime. Areas characterized by huge income disparities, especially if they occur across racial or other social boundaries, often have high crime rates. Such communities also do not have a high-quality network of job information, while the labour market is often reluctant to employ people from such communities (Maree, 2008:59). As a direct result, learners face the poor and uncertain prospect of being unemployed and a continuous cycle of poverty which, in turn, provides opportunities for criminal behaviour (Joubert, 2008b:119-120) as it leaves them with negative academic self-concepts, low levels of motivation and cumulative academic disadvantage (Prinsloo, 2004:158).

Another factor to take cognizance of is community disorganization, including aspects such as the continuous redistribution of the population and the loss of social control (fathers leave due to job-urbanization), cohesion and trust in the collective ability to direct affairs in an area in a positive direction (Maree,

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2008:59). Due to urbanization (a social developmental process), rural areas are, as pointed out by Prinsloo (2004:158), left impoverished and isolated. Maree (2008:60), similarly, shows that when parents leave their homes, the socio-economic needs of that family are left unsatisfied. This often accumulates in a breakdown of traditional norms and family bonds, and a widespread decline of family life.

On the other side of the spectrum, urban areas are also influenced by unplanned urbanization as previous well organized infrastructures are put under pressure to provide for the increasing number of people in these areas. High density housing is but one example of the latter (Prinsloo, 2004:160).

In terms of section 27(1)(c) of the Constitution of South Africa, Act 108 of 1996, everyone has the right to access social security, including the right to appropriate social assistance where persons are unable to support themselves and their dependants. The State's responsibility with regard to social security rights are, however, qualified by section 27(2) which provides that the State must take reasonable legislative and other measures – within its available resources – to achieve the progressive realization of the right contained in subsection (1)(c). Up to date, the State was, however, unable to provide adequate housing, shelter, basic nutrition, health care, social services, quality education facilities, afterschool care facilities and leisure facilities to all its inhabitants (Olivier *et al.*, 2003:379).

With regard to creating safe school environments, Van Jaarsveld (2008:175) outlines that although the responsibility for the safety of learners at schools previously lay with the individual school itself, today it requires the assistance of the school, the parents, the police, the Department of Education and the community in general. Flowing from the latter, it is evident that the problem of school vandalism can only be addressed successfully if all these individuals and institutions co-operate and work together in a coordinated manner.

Another area of concern is the fact that there is a common belief among South Africans that criminal acts are acceptable as long as you are not caught (Maree, 2008:61). The latter constitutes a problem as many acts of school vandalism are never reported or being instilled by learners being too young to be punished effectively by South Africa's legal system. As such perpetrators often go unpunished; resulting in young people learning that violence is legitimate (Leach, 2002:101) According to Nel (2006:18), South Africa is subject to a pervasive culture of violence – some would even typify the country as the most violent society in the world – and is, as a result, caught up in an escalating and unprecedented spiral of violence and violent crime in particular.

For many children violence has become normalized – it is regarded as a way of life and, as put forward by Leach 92002:100), as an accepted part of school life and a means through which to resolve conflict. The latter has, as set forward by Leoschut and Burton (2006;12), a multitude of implications for young people and is likely to impact negatively on their mental well-being, the development of healthy peer and authority relationships with especially educators and principals, and on their ability to resolve conflict in a positive manner.

Prinsloo (2004:158), moreover, opines that social obstacles such as poverty are regarded by some as an evil imposed on them by society. As a result, they feel that it is their right to take back from society what they need without delivering anything in return or to misuse and damage state property as they wish. It is, thus, evident that South African's established perceptions and convictions need to be changed. In this regard, Saunderson and Oswald (2009:143) show that despite the fact that any changing process is complex, changing a person's perceptions and beliefs; that have a direct impact on his/her behaviour; is even more challenging.

Children grow up in an extremely violent environment and in a culture of survival. Exposure to such violence is considered by Bach and Louw (2010:26) as still being the main predictor of mental instability (depression) among children as well

as of anti-social behavioural trends among the youth. In line with the latter and since much of what occurs in schools is learnt through exposure to violence at home and outside of schools, Burton (2008:15) underlines the necessity of employing an integrated approach to addressing school vandalism which are capable of moving beyond a limited focus on schools themselves.

Children are specifically impressionable. The destruction perpetrated during the recent Samwu march through Johannesburg by municipal workers who trashed streets and intimidated members of the public (Sema, 2010:7), was most informative. Aggressive behaviour among learners is thus provoked and reinforced by community members role-modelling violent acts and by the media through portraying aggressive behaviour as powerful and acceptable (television), as well as placing emphasis on such behaviour (newspapers; Mayer *et al.*, 1983:356).

For some, vandalism, stealing and violence have become normal and acceptable as being the solution to other problems (Hallahan & Kauffman, 2003:235; Maree, 2008:68). There is no strong moral foundation and the moral fibre of communities is questionable (Maree, 2008:62) as it leads to immorality (Prinsloo, 2004:159). Community-based violent victimization has been found to be significantly associated with the upsurge in young crime (Van den Aardweg, 1999:248). Research done by Bester and Du Plessis (2010:209) confirms that the main cause of school violence is violence modelled by society – violence, thus, has an institutional origin. Supportive of the latter, Joubert (2008b:119) maintains that crime is often portrayed as the product of deficiencies in the social structure (health, economy and education) of a society.

The community often also exposes the youth to the use of substances such as drugs and alcohol. In this regard, Burton (2008:16) reports that schools' surrounding communities are commonly found to be full of shebeens and taverns, providing educators and learners with ample opportunities to leave school during breaks or even during classes to buy and bring, among others,

alcohol to school grounds, thus undermining any sense of attachment that learners might have had to school and learning.

The research results of Reddington (2007:97) are, moreover indicative of the fact that the majority of youths arrested for property crimes were involved in the use of some substances at the time of the crime. The latter is an example of the community influencing humans and human behaviour influencing the community.

It is in this regard that Mayer *et al.* (1983:367) indicate the importance of comprehensive intervention programmes at schools, as well as in communities. Combating vandalism at schools is not enough, as elements from the community could spark such behaviour if not addressed in both spheres. Smit (2007:57), correspondingly, points out that, since schools are part of the broader community and reflects the behaviour patterns of society, they cannot be expected to maintain safe environments alone.

Having looked into the community as a system, it is now imperative to enquire into the application of the ecological and systems theory at schools.

3.2.3 Schools as systems

Next to family life, schools, as a key institution involving young people, play a vital part in the social development of the child (Du Toit, 2006:72). Burton (2008:16) posits that, since children spend up to two thirds of their waking hours at schools, they constitute one of the most influential environments on the development of the youth. De Wet (2007:191), concurrently, shows that children's experiences at school are fundamental to their successful transition into adulthood, while Prinsloo and Neser (2007:46) opine that it is common cause that schools are the embodiment of the community's educational responsibility and, increasingly, serve as agents of socialization.

Learners negotiate and renegotiate their relationships, self-image and independence in this system, while cultivating their interpersonal skills and refining their strengths amid struggling with their vulnerabilities. Research

conducted by Theron and Dunn (2010:239), for example, contend that schools can provide learners with the ability to cope with life's challenges by way of establishing environments where they can have a sense of belonging and serve as therapeutic spaces where they can learn coping skills by providing educators and co-learners who care and by initiating extra-mural activities which can proactively fill their time and offer opportunities to escape home-related problems.

In underscoring the important roles of schools, Burton (2008:15) reports that, those endeavouring to reduce all kinds of violence in South Africa, are increasingly looking at schools as key sites for intervention for introducing long-term strategies to put a halt to unacceptable high levels of violent crimes in this country.
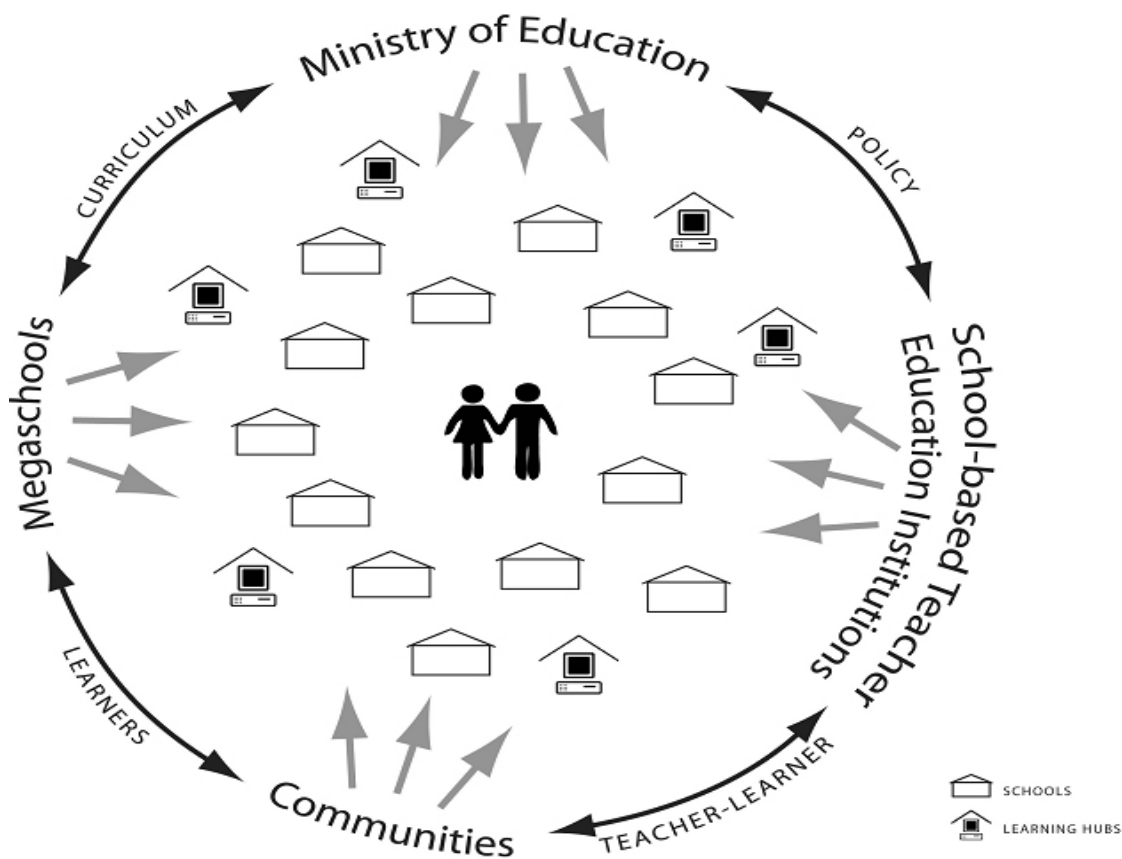
Figure 1.5 An educational ecosystem

As such, schools must provide healthy, safe and secure environments in which learners feel that educators care for them (De Wet, 2005:150; McWhirter *et al.*, 2004:80 *cf*. 1.1). Weeks (2009:1) contends that caring is the very bedrock of all successful education and needed to revitalize contemporary schooling. According to Rudolph *et al.* (2008:6) the building of caring school communities entails the strengthening of protective factors that could promote the well-being of children and reduce the risk factors that make children more vulnerable. The aim of a caring school community is thus to ensure that children's' basic needs are met and their rights are protected.

Mayer *et al.* (1983:355), concurrently, found – as far back as 1983 - that positive environments are indeed capable of displacing previous events that may have set the stage for vandalism.

Instead of providing safe and secure environments where children can learn and develop while enjoying themselves and feeling secure and where educators can teach, Van Jaarsveld (2008:175), to the contrary, sets forth that schools are increasingly being defined *as dangerous and unsafe places of learning.* Mayer *et al.* (1983:356), in support, opine that several complex and distant conditions of school environments such as a mismatch between the learners' reading abilities and the difficulty of assigned materials, the prevalence of unacceptable disciplinary measures and improper school management may contribute toward promoting vandalism. With the latter in mind and with direct regard to South Africa, the researcher wishes to indentify the disparity between learners' home language and language of instruction, the use of corporal punishment, despite being outlawed (84/1996:section 10), and the mismanagement of schools by principals constituting such complex conditions in this country.

When learners feel insecure or unsafe, many will become disaffected (Maree, 2008:67). Since self-realization is only possible through caring for others, schools need, as accentuated by Weeks (2009:1), to be transformed into *caring* schools in order to be better able to actualize learners' full potential. Bender and Emslie

(2010:63), in support, indicate that risk prevention and positive youth development efforts are associated with a safe, caring, participatory and responsive school climate.

While commenting on the poor matric results, O'Connel (quoted by Ferreira, 2008:16) states that schools lack an overall culture of learning. Reasons for the latter are posed to be the political failure to build a post-apartheid culture of learning to make up for lost decades when education was a tug of war, and the fact that schools operate without leadership and control. Resulting from the latter, matriculates still arrive at universities with poor cognitive skills and battle to cope with academic challenges. In response, Zille (quoted by Ferreira, 2008:16) acknowledges the long way to go before all South African learners are provided with real opportunities to improve their lives through quality education. After discussing the matric results of Katlehong Secondary School, being labeled as *the worst performing school* in Gauteng, Africa (2008:10) reports that learners' being allowed to do whatever they please, the absence of discipline and the occurrence of school vandalism are identified as the main reason why this school is being described as such.

The latter correlates with the theoretical approach adopted by many workplace studies in an attempt to identify work-related factors that place individual's physical and psychological health at risk and which contribute to negative organizational outcomes (Milner & Khosa, 2008:157).

Organizational health within schools, as described by Van der Westhuizen (2002:152), refers to schools that not only survive their environments, but continue to cope adequately in the long run, and continuously develop and extend their surviving and coping abilities. Such schools are not under undue pressure from the community, possess sufficient resources and sufficient facilities, are characterized by proper discipline, have principals who provide dynamic guidance, qualified teaching staff who are dedicated and learners who are motivated. In providing an example of environmental issues (the institutional

culture of the university) leading to undesired behaviour, De Vos and Jansen (as reported by Du Plessis, 2009:13) refer to the Reitz-four incident at the University of the Free State with regard to acts of discrimination based on race among students.

Prinsloo (2006:308), moreover, posits that the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom can only be upheld in safe school environments that are conducive to effective teaching and learning. While placing emphasis on the importance of human dignity, Du Plessis (2009:13) stresses that respect and dignity can only flourish if humans endeavour to understand why others behave as they do and, accordingly, try to change the circumstances underlying anti-social behaviour.

Schools as organizations, must, in addition, create new human resource policies to explicitly recognize and respond to the unique needs of individuals and the needs of specific communities (Maree, 2008:67; Loock *et al.*, 2009:16). Van Jaarsveld (2008:175), concurrently, cautions that since each has different problems and different needs, their security strategies, policies and procedures will have to vary according to their circumstances and environment. By placing emphasis on the importance of a school's community, Burton (2008:15) stresses that schools should not be isolated from their communities.

According to Freire (1993:16) schools as sources of education, either function as instruments that are used to facilitate the integration of the youth into the logic of the present system and bring about conformity, or to become the agents of freedom, the means by which humans can critically and creatively deal with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of the world.

With specific reference to schools as systems, Loock *et al.* (2009:2) indicate that the systems-model consists of basically three parts, namely inputs, the transformational process and outputs. Inputs consist mainly of social forces and institutions which influence and make demands on schools. They include skills that individuals bring with them when joining schools and the resources available

to schools. The transformational process is the process whereby schools convert the inputs from the environment into outputs. It includes managerial processes used and the context within which management must take place. The competence of the principal as leader and manager of the school, and the quality of teaching processes are only some of the components that influence the culture of learning and teaching within schools. Human resource management also plays an important role. Outputs include aspects such as achievement and dropout rates among learners, absenteeism, educator turnover and work satisfaction, as well as the attitudes of role players. It is, thus, important, as put forward by Mayer *et al.* (1983:357), to manipulate potential events within school settings if anti-social behaviour among learners is to be combated.

Loock *et al.* (2009:8) caution that the relationship between the individual and the school must be a mutually healthy and satisfactory relationship. If conflict exists between the school's demands and the needs and goals of the individual, it must be rectified, as it may negatively affect all role players (Maree, 2008:68). Everyone must work together to achieve the same goals and an environment must be created so that each can maximize the degree to which their respective demands are met, without relinquishing or compromising personal outcomes in the process (Steyn *et al.*, 2007:62). It is in this area that school principals and management teams need to play a major role as the school climate provides the stimuli to which all role players are exposed.

The climate of a school refers to the heart and soul thereof – the psychological and institutional attributes that give a school its personality and enduring quality as experienced by its members – which, in turn, affects their attitudes towards and behaviour at the school (Pretorius & De Villiers, 2009:33). In line herewith, Bender and Emslie (2010:55) refer to a school's climate as relating to the extent that the school staff members either promote or undermine positive learner development and effective family-school partnerships.

Caring schools possess, as set forward by Weeks (2009:5-6), the following elements:

- the prevalence of positive relationships, norms and values within a school;
- learners' sense of being in close, respectful relationships with peers and adults at school;
- focusing on an individual learner, his other self-esteem, his or her emotional literacy, social skills and his or her life and career planning; sympathetic guidance of learners, consideration of the physical, academic and emotional welfare of learners;
- a school that employs teachers who are empathetic, who praise and reward good behaviour, who comfort, reassure and encourage the learners, who help children to control their own behaviour;
- a school that provides coaching and instruction that is adapted to suit learners' needs and that creates an environment which promotes curiosity;
- a school that allows the teacher, not the learners, to set the relational tone, so that learners can put their faith in the educator as a trustworthy role model who demonstrates integrity when dealing with learners;
- a school that provides the core from which the teacher operates, the core that tempers and informs his/her actions and choices, thus allowing learners and teachers to benefit;
- a school which offers a sense of belonging, and, being accepted as a person, both of which enhance a sense of self and emotional security which, in turn, make the learners more likely to care for others;
- creating learning experiences that help learners to grow emotionally and to fully actualize all their talents and potential;
- offering fewer incidents of the bullying, fighting, vandalism, absenteeism, and drop-outs that plague contemporary schools;
- motivating learners to reach higher levels of academic performance by increasing their own expectations of their performance;
- offering socially acceptable conflict resolution; and

- like a family where learners care about one another and most of the learners are like brothers and sisters.

Learners who are, for example, constantly criticized and disrespected will react with negative behaviour while learners who are periodically praised by educators will, to the contrary, behave appropriately (Mayer *et al.*, 1983:357). School climate can, in addition, help or hinder educators as they attempt to satisfy their needs at work (Pretorius & De Villiers, 2009:34). Research conducted by Van Petegen *et al.* (2008:453) shows that perceptions of a school's climate is important, as it may have a positive or negative impact on the implementation of change and on educators' job satisfaction, motivation, productivity and general well-being, as well as on learner achievement, development and behaviour.

As pointed out by Joubert (2008b:119), schools have, however, become a major concern and a vital risk factor in respect of youth behaviour. In this regard, Maree (2008:57) highlights that weakened communities with struggling households (families) produce schools that have a tenuous place in those communities and a limited capacity to prepare learners for participation in mainstream society or for establishing healthy extra-family relationships and personality types, thus contributing to an increased risk of youth coming into conflict with the law.

Schools have, accordingly, become soft targets for criminals and vandals (Masuku, 2008:9). In providing examples of the latter, Obose (2010:2) reports on thugs targeting a school in Cape Town for the eleventh time. In the process of stealing three sinks, fifteen taps and a security gate from the school to sell to scrap yards, the buildings were extremely vandalised, leaving learners and staff members without places to wash their hands and taps to drink from, as well as the State with an enormous financial burden to replace the stolen property, fix the buildings and employ security officers.

Kabeni (2010:7) also reports on vandalism occurring at the Vulkni Primary School in Cape Town despite an alarm system. Doors were found broken, roofs were destroyed in order to gain access to and steal the food meant for poor

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learners who attend the school, bathrooms were ripped of all copper pipes and water taps and computers were smashed up and looted of parts for resale purposes. Although the community was asked for assistance in reporting the incidence or to come forward with information, no one responded. The police was, nevertheless, able to arrest four suspects between the ages of 18 and 28.

Commenting on acts of vandalism, Anon (2007:7) proposes that vandals have little or no regard for schools as learning institutions, while calling on all learners to start valuing, cherishing and protecting schools that are meant to empower them. The same author also pleads with community members to stand together and fight saboteurs (vandals) and report acts of violence to the police.

It is, however, necessary that an individualised, holistic view must be taken with regard to school vandalism. Van Jaarsveld (2008:183), to the same extent, emphasises that there are various factors that can contribute to and influence the security problems at schools. These include the different geographical locations and size (both physical and student numbers) of schools, the political, economic and community atmosphere, the type of property, as well as the potential of an existing threats. Schools should thus take cognisance of their unique situations and circumstances, the problems they have had in the past and the operational support provided by other organizations, school staff, parents and the community, when planning intervention strategies to elevate themselves from such problems.

De Wet (2007:193) cautions that if schools are unable to provide safe and secure environments for learners to develop appropriate social behaviour, dire consequences may follow. Socialization is defined by Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009:48) as the *process of learning the values and norms of society or the subculture to which the individual belongs*. The same authors point out that although both primary and secondary socialization are normally provided by the family, school and peer groups, schools can be regarded as the *basic conduit*

which channels community and adult influences, thus elevating schools to become the primary instruments of socialization.

Therefore, if problems are ignored and aggressive behaviour is not addressed, learners are likely to become more aggressive and less tolerant, which again contributes to criminal behaviour (Maree, 2008:66). The fact that many public schools, in contrast with private schools, do not provide sports and recreational facilities (drama and other cultural events) to promote constructive leisure time, leads, according to Joubert (2008b:119), to public schools often being characterized by crime and a lack of discipline. The reason for the latter, as set forward by Burton (2008:19), is that learner involvement in positive activities reduces their exposure to gangs and violence or criminal opportunities. Underscoring the latter, Makgotho (2007:9) states *a child in sport is a child out of prison.*

An overall lack of financial means, however, hampers schools in creating such safe environments and offering sufficient extra-mural activities. Mohlala (2008:4) refers to statistics indicating that 13 912 public schools in South Africa out of the total 26 099 public schools in this country fit into the *very poor* category. Resulting from the latter, these schools are confronted, on a daily basis, with problems around security, vandalism, learner and educator absenteeism and learner-on-learner violence, while also experiencing a lack of supportive infrastructure that can facilitate quality teaching and learning.

Papayya (2007:2; *cf.* 1.2) reports on a successfully collaborative effort of parents, learners, educators as well as the broader community in order to combat vandalism at their school and to rebuild their vandalized school. The principal of the school, Mnithathi, states that education officials, the school's staff and parents decided they had to work together to rebuild their school and make the atmosphere conducive to learning. The personnel, together with the help of learners, started cleaning up the school grounds as they felt that a clean environment would improve their academic results. Sponsors from the

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community were gained as they realized that the education department could not pay the estimated R500 000 needed. Local businessmen also volunteered to help with the rebuilding of the school. To date all the school's windows have been fixed, the corridors have been cleaned and the school has been fenced off – all done to assist the school in doing what it can do best, namely to teach and educate learners.

As schools, as subsystems, comprise different parts such as, *inter alia,* principals, educators, administration personnel, the School Governing Body, learners, parents and the curriculum, emphasis will be placed on the essential role-players in education.

3.2.3.1 Principals

Schools place certain organizational demands such as establishing school and community relationships, quality planning and organization, responsibility for creating a safe environment, managing change and implementing departmental policies on principals (Loock *et al.*, 2009:5; *cf.* 4.5.2). In this regard, Prinsloo (2006:308) posits that good management practices by principals are a distinctive characteristic of safe schools while Smit (2007:55) contends that school safety leadership begins at the top, with principals.

In order to ensure that principals adhere to their responsibilities, Burton (2008:16) calls for them to be held accountable for dealing appropriately with unacceptable behaviour on the part of educators and learners. The migration of learners and the so-called *re-culturing* of schools are, as put forward by Loock *et al.* (2009:15), factors that, pose many challenges to school managers and educators in South Africa.

Principals bring some managerial skills (personal and vocational) to the system which needs to be sufficient to enable them to cope with the various demands in order to bring equilibrium at schools. This is the ideal situation, leading to organizational effectiveness and individual improvement. (Loock *et al.*, 2009:5). A

firm, fair and consistent school system has the potential to reduce anti-social behaviour such as vandalism, while unfairness leads to aggression which is satisfied through, among others, vandalizing school property (Van den Aardweg, 1999:248). If a school's demands are, however, greater than the managerial skills, disequilibrium exists. Such an imbalance, in turn, leads to stress which is defined by Milner and Khosa (2008:157) as *a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his/her resources and endangering his/her well-being.* As a result, principals need to balance the dynamics of the individual-organisational interaction continuously with the application of sound managerial practices (Loock *et al.*, 2009:8).

As *ex officio* members of School Governing Bodies, it is the responsibility of principals to compile school policies and procedures as a vital part of schools' security programme. Rogers (2005:32-34) states that the aim of policies is to set guidelines and provide direction as to how schools should be effectively managed and handled. As such, policies reflect the goals and objectives that schools want to achieve and, therefore, assist with decision-making processes. Policies on school security, as avowed by Van Jaarsveld (2008:182), provide for safety procedures to be followed, while informing everyone how the objectives of schools should be obtained and how security activities must be conducted in order to, *inter alia,* solve and reduce of crime and violence on school premises.

Although principals are always encouraged to obtain an open door approach to communities, Van Jaarsveld (2008:184) suggests that schools should not have an open door policy to outsiders. Strangers and criminals are best kept outside. As such, principals should see to it that control and record are kept on all who enters school premises, thus preventing all unauthorized persons from entering and posing threats to the wellbeing of learners and educators alike.

In making another valuable input in this regard, Capozzoli and McVey (2000: 31) suggest that schools create a reporting system, where learners, parents and

educators can report threats and incidents that have taken place, so that the appropriate. Seeing that people usually do, for a range of reasons, including a lack of confidence in the police, a sense of relative unimportance of the act, apathy, a lack of trust in school authorities, or fear of retribution, not report vandalism, Burton (2008:19) cautions that the mere establishing of reporting systems may not be enough. People also need to be encouraged, taught to take responsibility for issues that affect them, and made aware of the fact that their silence undermines both the monitoring of incidents, as well as trends and measures to deal effectively therewith. To attain cooperation in this regard, the same authors also stresses the importance of making anonymous reporting systems available and provide all with feedback on what actions has been taken against the perpetrators with regards to their report.

3.2.3.2 Educators

Positive educator–learner relationships have the potential of creating stimulating learning environments in classrooms, leading to learners benefitting from the teaching-learning situation (Van Petegen *et al.*, 2008:452-453; Hood & Hood, 2001:175). Saunderson and Oswald (2009:158) also show that the existence of positive relationships between educators and learners is one of the most important factors in establishing a disciplined environment. In this regard, Murphy and Gallagher (2009:158), however, caution that the way out of and away from violence is, inevitably, a long and slow process, which requires educators' care and empathy.

Mokhele (2006:149&158), moreover, accentuates that relationships built on trust, positive classroom management, control mechanisms and educator authority towards a positive educator–learner relationship which will minimize the occurrence of misbehaviour in the classroom. De Wet (2005:150), similarly, points out that positive educator-learner relationships and mutual respect counteract anti-social behaviour such as school vandalism. In a democratic classroom, the educator–learner partnership should, however, be based on the

learner´s willingness to accept the educator´s authority. Learners should not be forced, but invited to take part in this relationship (Hood & Hood, 2001:175). This can be accomplished by involving learners in establishing classroom rules, allowing them to take leadership roles, by role-modelling expected behaviour, by involving parents, peers and other educators close to the learner and by respecting them. As such, educators and learners become jointly responsible for a process in which both groups can grow and flourish (Freire, 1993:61). In this regard, Van Petegen *et al.* (2008:451-452) indicate that the perceptions of learners regarding the interpersonal behaviour of educators are equally important as they influence learners' attitudes towards the school and learning.
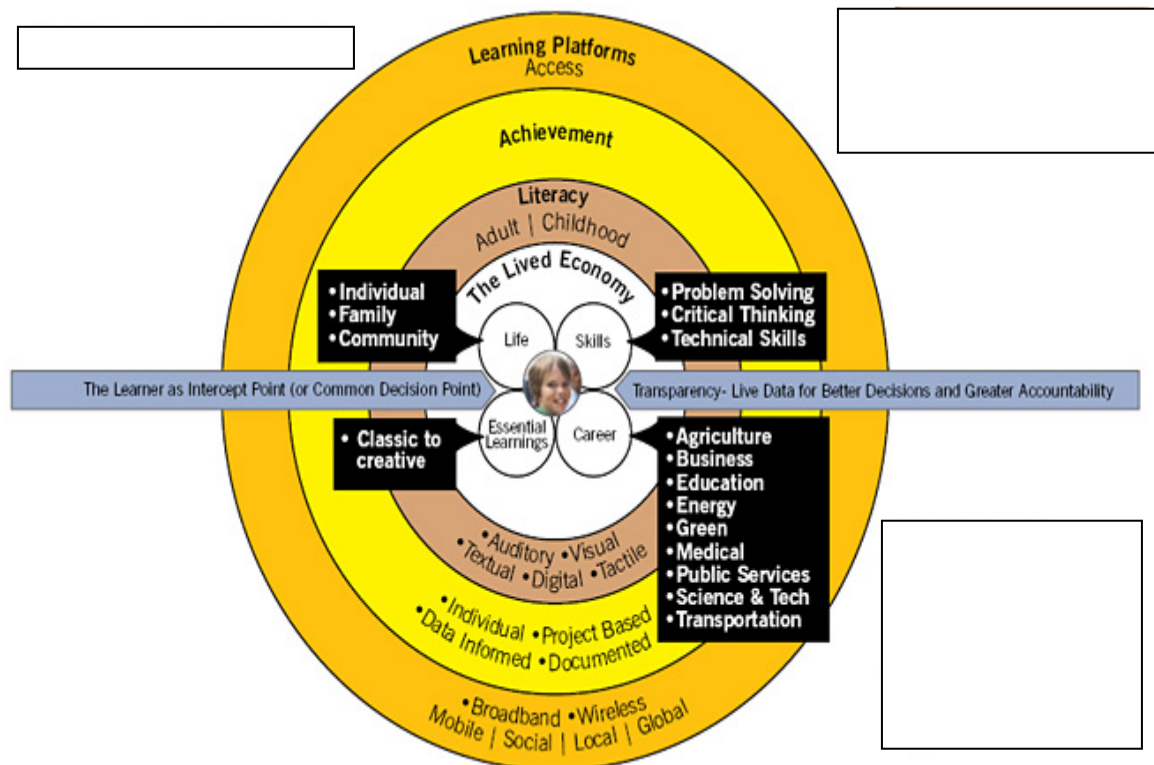
Figure 1.6 A model for sustainable education

In practice, most educators are, however, still uncertain about the type of interpersonal relationship that will ensure the desired classroom environment while some are even afraid to encourage personal relationships with learners, fearing that it would lead to a total loss of authority in classrooms (Mokhele,

2006:150). In this regard, Freire (1993:56) proposes that efforts from educators must, from the outset, coincide with those of the learners to engage them in critical thinking and a quest for mutual humanization.

Hood and Hood (2001:157) show that educators often encounter serious problems in classrooms, which makes it impossible for them to maintain a relationship of mutual trust and respect with learners. Large schools with large classes, for example, tend, according to Van den Aardweg (1999:248), to experience more vandalism. This is due to impersonality and alienation as educators are unable to relate to all learners. As a result, learners feel that they are unknown and unaccepted and, thus, have no pride in their schools. Due to overcrowded classes, educators also have to raise their voices which may, as pointed out by Bester and Du Plessis (2010:225), be interpreted as rejection, criticism, failure and punishment. Supportive of the latter, Maree (2008:67) shows that school crimes increase with factors such as school size, the number of learners per educator and the extent to which learning resources are available.

External and internal demands, pressures and conditions, in addition, often present obstacles for educators to achieve their goals while they lead to stress (inherent in particular events, situations or environments that affects individual's and are potentially harmful; Milner & Khosa, 2008:157), dropout, burnout, disillusionment and demoralization. These include ill-disciplined learners, apathy and lack of professional support, as well as insufficient financial and community support (Loock *et al.*, 2009:18). Saunderson and Oswald (2009:144) report that educators are currently bombarded with various demands including coping with policy and curriculum changes, rationalization, decentralization, the abolishment of corporal punishment and an increased educator-learner ratio. These demands, according to the same authors, inevitably affect what happens at schools and in classrooms and may negatively influence the relationships between educators and learners. Milner and Khosa (2008:175) underscore the latter by indicating that demanding situations generally evoke negative emotions which negatively influence persons' performance. Leach (2002:101), moreover, contends that

most people largely ignore the important role the curriculum, schools organisation and educators' attitude in socialising learners into the responsible adults South Africa so urgently needs.

Since much of the responsibility for the prevention of vandalism falls on the shoulders of educators, who may themselves feel ill equipped to fulfil this responsibility or who may fear the behaviour of their own learners, Bender and Emslie (2010:56) underline the importance of providing them with a better understanding of the multi-faceted problem of addressing school vandalism, which should guide them in adopting appropriate strategies for preventing such acts.

Research conducted by De Wet (2010:198; *cf.* 1.2), however, indicates that most educators complain that they do not receive the necessary support from their colleagues. In underscoring these results, Rademeyer (2008b) reports on the general perception of educators that there is also a lack of support from especially the provincial education departments. Maree (2008:68) also indicates a lack of support from School Governing Bodies. Conversely, educators feel exposed and relatively defenceless (De Wet, 2010:199). In this regard, Loock *et al.* (2009:20) propose that a thorough understanding of the vision and mission of schools and education in general for the future will help educators to overcome the common feeling that top management does not understand the operating problems faced by them.

Educators are, however, often to blame for learners misbehaving at school. Joubert (2008b:119) maintains that some educators set poor examples to learners, such as being absent, implementing erratic discipline, being unprepared and even selling exam papers. Hood and Hood (2001:157) also mention that some educators are still using authoritarian teaching strategies which encourage learners to rely heavily on them, discourage them to fully participate and de-motivate them to take responsibility for their own learning (Van Petegen *et al.*, 2008:463-464). This leads, as set forward by Freire (1992:54), to learners merely

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adapting to the world as it is and the fragmented view of reality deposited in them.

Authoritarian strategies implemented by educators may also, as pointed out by Kapp (2006:117), arouse resistance, dissatisfaction and rebelliousness. Hood and Hood (2001:157), however, feel that they cannot be blamed as most of them were trained within the framework of a segregated education system. They must receive retraining to enable them to work effectively in a truly democratic education system. Training for educators is also emphasized by Saunderson and Oswald (2009:158) in stressing the fact that educators generally feel disempowered as they are often challenged beyond their abilities.

Educator absenteeism, particularly chronic at poor schools where alcohol and substance abuse are more prevalent and where educators do not feel safe (Mohlala, 2008:4), also creates problems with regard to educators being regarded as role models for children and with regard to building long-lasting relationships between educators and learners (Burton, 2008:17).

Another factor that needs attention, especially when it comes to the retraining of educators, is the diversity among South African learners. Both the Constitution and the Schools Act (84/1996) entrench the rights of all learners, regardless of race, colour, gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, culture or language, to basic education and access to any educational institution of their choice. The Department of Education's White Paper 6 (DoE,1997:11), furthermore, places a special responsibility on educators to ensure that all learners, with and without disabilities, pursue their learning potential to the fullest. The latter poses, as put forward by Weeks (2009:1) a very distinct challenge to educators, who need to cope with the diverse demands that come their way, such as school violence, disciplinary problems and uncooperative parents.

Loock *et al.* (2009:15) acknowledge that, although diversity may make some important contributions and lead to new educational opportunities, it often poses serious challenges to educators. Within multicultural education, the educator has,

inter alia, to change his/her style of teaching and adapt to new circumstances to provide quality education to all learners and to create suitable learning environments that meet the needs of learners from diverse backgrounds.

With reference to South Africa's pluralistic society, Leach (2002:100), stresses that there is a need for a greater realisation of the dominant teaching styles in schools as current educator-led lessons, the excessive reliance on repetition and rote-learning as well as the discouragement of learners' questioning are not conducive to encouraging attitude and behaviour change among learners.

In this regard, Murphy and Gallagher (2009:158) caution that the fact that educators' culture may also differ from that of the school or the dominant culture of the learner population, is often overlooked. Educators may, for example, be bearers of traditional mores, values and prejudices, rather than being neutral mediums for the articulation of facts or objective analyses of events. The vast majority of educators in South Africa are, for instance, from a population that was shaped and influenced by past apartheid struggles, and participated in it, even if passively. Educators, like other adults in their community, may have had anger, sadness and fear as formative experiences. Many will have experienced a profound sense of injustice about the apartheid regime that consumed their childhood and young adult lives and made them and their families feel unsafe and insecure. It is, thus, essential, as pointed out by Saunderson and Oswald (2009:147) that schools urgently develop the capacity to reveal and challenge *deeply entrenched deficit views* of differences, defining certain learners as troublesome.

Educators are also expected to be knowledgeable on all cultures and to be able to accommodate differences despite the ever-increasing lack of finances to assist them in obtaining, among others, appropriate teaching material (Prinsloo, 2004:159). The accommodation of diversity is important as the inability of the education system to reform is presented as one of the major causes of crime at South African schools (Maree, 2008:66).

Educators also experience problems in dealing with misbehaviour among learners which are, as pointed out by Saunderson and Oswald (2009:143), drastically increasing and prefer to ignore misbehaviour open themselves to criticism for not standing up to learners and disciplining them. Educators, who, on the other hand, prefer to stand up against misbehaving learners and try to discipline them, are often regarded as violating learners' rights (Rademeyer, 2008a). Because of these contradicting reactions, educators experience feelings of guilt (they are afraid to ruin vandals' lives) and frustration, ending up questioning or doubting their own professional efficiency and ability to control learners (De Wet, 2010:196-197). Disrespectful and extreme disruptive behaviour among learners, moreover, hamper educators in providing and supporting quality learning processes in their classrooms (Saunderson & Oswald, 2009:143).

Discipline problems at schools are, as set foreword by Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009:49), also coupled with the over-emphasizing of children's rights to the detriment of educators, as this leads to learners becoming less inclined to accept authority (Saunderson & Oswald, 2009:154). Accordingly, educators are becoming less accommodating, unwilling to take pro-active approaches or even preferring to suffer in silence, rather than risk becoming objects of derision by admitting they have lost power in the classroom. As a result, educators are leaving the education profession or remain teaching with less motivation in an attempt to *only survive each day* (Saunderson & Oswald, 2009:143).

With regards to children's rights, Leach (2002;110) outlines an important aspect, namely that a culture of tolerance towards violent behaviour among learners, on the other side, constitutes a violation of the majority of learners' right to an adequate education in a safe and secure environment. There is thus, according to the same author, an urgent need to break the silence surrounding all school-based violence. Many educators also perceive anti-social behaviour such as vandalism being more and more directed towards them as authority figures (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010:224). Research conducted by Van der Westhuizen

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and Maree (2009:58), moreover, indicates that educators believe that well-implemented codes of conduct for learners could make a major difference at schools. Due to the absence of the latter and an absolute lack of sufficient conflict management strategies at schools, educators often experience a feeling that they are not equipped to deal with misbehaviour at schools (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010:226) and not able to be the architects of a better future for South Africa (Murphey & Gallagher, 2009:158). Burton (2008:17) also underscores the use of effective classroom and school management that will enable and enhance discipline and control, while facilitating a safer physical environment where learners can safely spend their time

Emanating from the above, educators often react to vandalism with a sense of negativity or even anger towards learners. This takes the form of ignoring learners (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010:225) and, as such, depriving them of education (Kapp, 2006:117). Ignoring learners place them at risk and may, in addition, lead to them misbehaving (Maree, 2007:69), as the relationship between the educator and learner correlates with learner well-being (Van Petegen *et al.*, 2008:462). In this regard, Freire (1993:58) points out that, educators cannot merely co-exist with their learners, as true guidance and open communication is needed for quality education to take place.

According to De Wet (2010:200), all educational role players must accept that anti-social problems such as vandalism are not merely the symptoms of bad teaching and/or the inability to discipline misbehaving learners, but the outcome of individual institutional and community circumstances. In emphasizing the latter, Kapp (2006:116) suggests that many learners display behavioural problems even before entering the school. Bester (2007:189), in addition, states that since children's character and behavioural traits are linked to their social actions, they would be better understood at school if sufficient information on their social environments is easily available. Saunderson and Oswald (2009:156), moreover, stress the importance of educators acknowledging the

influences of social issues such as poverty, violence, unemployment and concomitant work stress, as well as that of HIV/AIDS on learners.

3.2.3.3 Parents

Moore *et al.* (2003:253) refers to an existing gap between adult culture and youth culture when stressing that, when parents (adults) are not present in the children's lives, they will not be able to teach them adult values such as self-discipline, mutual respect, patience, empathy towards others, self-reliance and generosity. The latter leads, as pointed out by Van Jaarsveld (2008:179), to the youth becoming exceptionally vulnerable to dangerous influences from peers and the media, and allowing cliques, gangs and rivalries to grow.

Bach and Louw (2010:26), correspondingly, show that children living with their mothers, specifically, in close companionship; tend to cope much better with social problems encountered during their developmental years than those growing up without a mother. The results of a research conducted by Fitzpatrick (1993:524) also indicate that healthy family and personal protective factors act as buffers against symptoms of, among other, depression resulting from being exposed to violent acts by others at school.

In recognizing the vital role that parents play in their children's education, the South African Schools Act (84/1996) encourages and promotes parental involvement in education by proposing a partnership in education (Serfontein, 2010:100). Three decades of research have demonstrated strong linkages between parental involvement in education and school achievement (Brown, 1998:18). Comber (2002:68) contends that family involvement is found to be most intense among middle and upper-class families. Advantages of positive parental involvement include better school attendance, higher achievements and stronger cognitive skills. Adding to the advantages, Cushman (1996:65) indicates that, when parents assist elementary learners with their schoolwork, social class and education become far less important factors in predicting the children's academic success.

To obtain the collaboration of parents with specific reference to school safety, Van Jaarsveld (2008:184) points out that all parents should be requested, from the outset, to sign contracts when enrolling their children into the school, clearly stating their responsibilities as parents and also informing them about the policies, the school's Code of Conduct for Learners (to be compiled by the School Governing Body according to section 8 of the Schools Act (84/1996)) and the procedures that they and their children have to adhere to. Smit (2007:56), concurrently, refers to the need of parents and/or guardians to take the primary responsibility for the conduct and discipline of their children and to share the burden of inculcating discipline with educators.

Since less emphasis was, traditionally, placed on parental involvement at public schools, university faculties of education have, subsequently, offered little direct and practical training to aspirant educators in forming effective parent/educator relationships (Brown, 1999:116). A number of factors have in recent years, however, contributed to the current focus on parental involvement as a way to improve educational outcomes for all children from, specifically, low-income families.

This is important, since it is recognized that the absence of parental involvement does not promote a climate of learning in school activities (Joubert, 2008b:119). A lack of support and help from parents, in addition, presents a serious hindrance to learners' acceptance of educators' authority (Mokhele, 2006:157). Parents should also teach children to accept educators as their parents *in loco parentis* or at least as guardians.

As put forward by Serfontein (2010:95), it is apparent that legislation has dramatically altered the role of parents as the majority members of School Governing Bodies regarding education. This is due to the fact that School Governing Bodies now legally have the power to establish the overall character and ethos of public schools. In accordance with section 20 of the Schools Act (84/1996), parents, as members of School Governing Bodies, have to take

responsibility for acting in the best interests of schools when drawing up school documentation and supporting the staff members in the performance of their professional duties. In line with this, parents must draw up a Code of Conduct for learners (84/1996: section 8) providing them with guidelines as to the kind of behaviour expected from them and what steps will be taken if learners do not comply with this. It is also the right of only the School Governing Body to suspend learners from schools (84/1996: section 9).

Comber (2002:98), in addition, shows that vast economic and demographic changes during the past twenty years have resulted in increased economic adversity and stress for many families and accompanying pressure on schools to increase its nation's competitiveness in a global economy. There is, thus, a growing recognition to foster school readiness for kindergarten and for overall success, as children entering schools without being ready for it are likely to get negative responses from peers and educators (Kapp, 2006:117). In order to obtain this goal, educational environments will need to address the strengths and needs of the holistic child.

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP, 1995:13) endorsed a complex, multifaceted definition of readiness, which includes physical well-being, motor development, social competence, positive approaches towards learning, language and literacy, cognitive development and general knowledge. This comprehensive definition requires a new approach to schooling: an approach including a shared responsibility for children's development and likely to alter the relationships between schools, families and communities permanently.
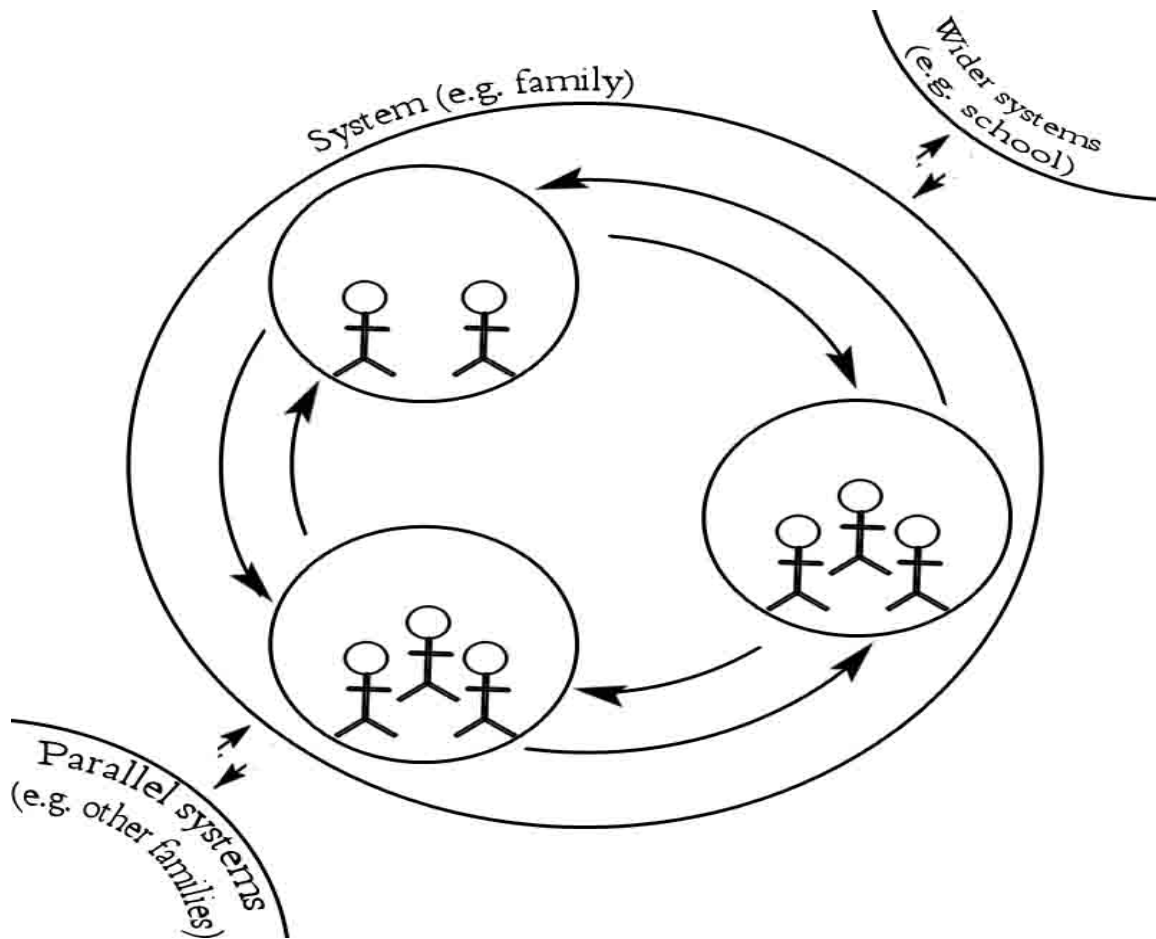
Figure 1.7 Systems, subsystems, and their interaction

3.3 THE APPLICATION OF AN ECO-SYSTEMIC THEORY TO SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY INTERVENTIONS

Joubert (2008b:120) points out that the predominance of South Africa's risk factors is of a social nature. A need for social control is, thus, evident. Young people's behaviour should be regulated and controlled within a bond of attachment (affection and care) and constructive involvement in order for them to develop a belief system that reflects a personal will to display socially acceptable and law-abiding behaviour. The same author is of the opinion that this can only be done if children are committed to society. They have to form a social bond with society and invest in its future. The latter can, however, only be realised when they are taken care of, when sound educational policies exist and job opportunities are created.

According to Burton (2008:17), empathy, self-esteem, self control, inter-personal skills, as well as morality and an appropriate sense of right and wrong are identified as key factors in building resilience to crime and violence through the developmental years and in later life, which all are, as set forward by Farrington and Welsh (2007:23), important traits that are, to a large degree, molded in early childhood

Smit (2007:53), on the other hand, stresses the importance of creating a safe physical environment as the starting point to combat, *inter alia,* vandalism in schools. He outlines that the securing of school properties presents a practical problem that demands practical solutions. The same author, conversely, points out that secure environments are only part of broader intervention programmes as the finding of solutions to the psychological problems learners encounter resorting to violent acts is far more complex and cannot merely be approached on the level of installing locks, alarm systems and fences.

In support of Smit, Bucher and Manning (2005:55) propose that schools need a major strategic commitment to safety which involves clear intervention programmes and placing school safety at the top of the educational agenda. Knowledge of risk and protective factors is used in the post-modern era to promote the enhancement of nurturing environments for children in families, schools and communities. Diggings *et al.* (1999:57) identify the need for mediating mechanisms which act in ways to reduce the impact of risks and negative chain reactions, to maintain self-efficiency through relationships and task achievement and to open opportunities for positive development.

According to Peterson (2004:18), risk is a statistical concept used to predict the probability of negative chain outcomes. Resilience and protective factors are the positive side of vulnerability and risk and include active problem-solving skills as well as a sense of self-esteem and self-efficiency (Guskey, 2000:18). Risk and protective factors, as put forward by Lyons (2000:54), are found within the child's environment (high crime levels, caring adults, high expectation and good

schools). In this regard, Van Jaarsveld (2008:182; *cf.* 1.2), however, cautions that since risks are dynamic and are constantly changing, regular risk assessment are needed and intervention programmes altered. The same author contends that even the pattern of risks may change as a result of security measures being implemented. As vandals become aware of the installment of security cameras or other measures, they may avoid such places and move (crime displacement) their activities to other areas on the school premises or to a neighbouring school.

With specific reference to risks in families, Bird and Elliot (1996:43) posit that a child or family's developmental trajectory results from the negotiation of risks on the one hand and the exploitation of opportunities on the other. According to Buenfil-Burgos and Nidia (2000:34), a way to conceptualize these interactions is to think of an ever changing equation containing plus minus numbers. At any given time, two or more numbers may combine to boost development into a positive direction or push development toward negative outcomes. If the *solution* of the equation were graphed repeatedly over time, it would represent the trajectory of an individual.

Epstein (2002:6) opines that a child's potential could be unrealized or move in a negative direction if a school setting fails to provide appropriate educational experience. Although the presence of a single risk factor typically does not threaten positive development, the interaction between risk and protective factors, nevertheless, determines the course of a child's development (Kelly, 1998:33). In this regard, Badat and Saleem (1998:33) caution that if multiple risk factors, such as poverty, accumulate and are not offset by compensating protective factors, healthy development is compromised.

Protective factors, to the contrary, reduce the effects of risk and promote healthy development. These factors, as set forth by Badat and Salem (1998:33), influence the way a person responds to a risk situation. Martin and Holt (2002:11) point out that, protective factors are not characteristics of the person or the situation, but rather the results of the interaction between the two in the presence

of risks. The presence of protective factors helps to change a development trajectory from a negative direction to one with a greater chance of positive outcome.

In view of the above, schools should place emphasis on eliminating or reducing existing dysfunctional school environments and optimize mastery and efficiency (Yap *et al.,* 2000:18). The application of an ecological perspective at schools and community intervention programmes (cutting across all sectors and conventional school-based role players; Burton, 2008:15), will, as stated by Telem (2001:321), result in the recognition of the strength and capabilities of schools and communities. In this regard, Robb (2002:18) posits that effective services for schools and communities should reflect support principles which are premised on programmes that intend to work with whole families, programmes that provide services, training and support to increase a family's capacity to manage family functions effectively and increase their ability to nurture their children.

In support, Greene and Grant (2000:43), Yap *et al.* (2000:50) and OFSTED (2002:1) call for programmes that facilitate the ability of parents to participate in decision-making processes and school governance. Burton (2008:17) contends that cross-cutting engagement between the full range of all educational role players must be initiated, aiming at dealing with the school environment, violence in the community and at home, as well as with factors that facilitate violence such as easy access to alcohol, weapons and drugs. Intervention programmes resulting from the latter should, according to the same author, seek to offer both short-term and medium term benefits, bearing in mind that long-term behavioural change is unlikely to be immediately evident.

With reference to collaboration between educational role players (a collaborative partnership), Smit (2007:54) opines that safe schools are characterised by schools who value all participants and allow the entire school community to fully and productively participate with the aim of creating a challenging and stimulating environment. The same author, in addition, places emphasis on the important

role that learners can play in their own safety and safe-school planning by stating that learners are often the best crime prevention planners in the school environment.

It is also extremely important that the governance and management of schools are stable, purposeful and efficient so as to provide a beneficial developmental infrastructure to learners and educators (Larson, 2002:16-17).

Bach and Louw (2010:33), moreover, propose that pre-existing strengths and resources that communities already possess, which have contributed to the resilience of certain people in the face of adversity, should be used as a starting point for intervention programmes. In this regard, Burton (2008:20) shows that the basic infrastructure and resources available to school differ substantively across South Africa which limits the success of a national linear approach to wider implementation of school programmes, and that schools should, therefore, use those that are unique to their environment. Children could, for example, according to Bach and Louw (2010:33) be taught effective coping and problem-solving strategies at schools to empower them against the stressors surrounding them. Despite the latter, the same authors emphasize on the need that all levels of society must play an active role in addressing the current strife going on in South Africa, from the micro- to the macro-level of society.

Van Jaarsveld (2008:183), concurrently, expresses that principals, as school managers, must work together with existing structures within their communities. Close alliances between principals, community security departments, and police departments are essential. The latter will ensure that security at schools is managed in accordance with established security and police procedures. As such, security programmes should be properly planned, responsible individuals should be effectively trained and written policies and flexible procedures should be adopted to set forth the exact procedures for preventing, deterring or handling vandalism in schools, as well as for handling crisis. It is, according to the same

author necessary that school policies should send out a strong message of zero-tolerance towards those who wish to disobey it.

Above all, role players should collectively strive to create school and community environments that are based on care. The latter lies at the basis of all intervention programmes with regard to combating negative behaviour as giving care and being cared for are regarded by Weeks (2009:3) as a basic fundamental human need. As such, all must establish a special attitude of caring for each other as well as for property belonging to others if South Africa wants to survive and be a whole (*cf.* 1.2 & 1.3).

By placing emphasis on care, Noddings (1992:xi) defines care as being similar to the need to be understood, received, respected and recognized, while pointing out that it must be remembered that the capacity to care differs from person to person, since people have different caring capacities. Caring, according to Weeks (2009:5) entails an attitude and commitment; a combination of honesty and patience; trust; respect; humility and courage; empathy with others; encouragement; devotion; the one person helping the other to grow; and, thus, a sense of community. Adding to the latter, Alder (2002:242-243) posits that care includes the ability to share oneself - physically, emotionally, socially, mentally, materially in proper proportions without unnecessary defenses; to assume personal responsibility for others' welfare, acknowledge each other's needs and to act responsively.

Noddings (1992:xi), however, also underscores the fact that people need to be open to receive and experience the care others provide to them and that one can only care for others if he/she is cared for by others. It is, thus, vital that the cared-for, needs to respond positively towards the career, in order to maintain the reciprocal, caring relationship. All caring is, therefore, double-edged. It is grounded in an ethic of responsibility to self and to others. By applying this concept to vandalism in schools, the researcher points out that learners need to be cared for by those surrounding them but that they should, in addition, be

empowered to recognize and accept such care before being enabled to reflect the virtues and capabilities to show the same degree of care to others and to, accordingly, show respect for the property of schools. Learners should, correspondingly be assisted to develop attitudes and skills in order to sustain caring relations and a desire to keep up caring behaviour. To obtain the latter, values must be instilled in learners which, in turn, must be modeled, respected and communicated to them by caregivers who take cognizance of their unique needs.

3.4 VANDALISM AT SCHOOLS

A school's proximity to learners' homes makes it a convenient target for vandalism, while the presence of non-learner youth around the school increases the risk to schools (Van den Aardweg, 1999:248; *cf.* 1.2) which negatively influence the total learning environment and result in huge financial losses (Maree, 2008:67). Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009:44), similarly show that the wave of violence is engulfing South Africa and negatively impacting the culture of schools.

To reach consensus on a precise definition of vandalism, as put forward by Horowitz and Tobaly (2003:1), is not an easy task (*cf.* 1.2) due to the fact that vandalism can take many forms, such as trashing dormitories, smashing windows, stealing property, breaking fixtures and fittings, tearing out wiring (Houlan, 2005:1) and writing graffiti (Epstein & Finn, 2002:1).

Johnson (2005:14) defines vandalism as the deliberate defacement, mutilation and/or destruction of private or public property. Vandalism can, according to Stahl (2000:138) be described as the purposeful damaging, violation, defacement or destruction of public or private property by persons who are not the direct owners of such property.

Although vandalism at schools often takes the form of minor incidents that can only be regarded as minor crime, Klonsky (2002:67; *cf.* 1.2) explains that it generally has a profound emotional impact on those affected by it.

In order to understand the complexity of vandalism, focus will forthwith be placed on the historical background and origin thereof, the negative impact it has on people, the extent of school vandalism, and the characteristics of vandals as well as defining important concepts.

3.4.1 Historical background and origin of vandalism

Vandalism, as the conspicuous defacement or destruction of a structure or symbol against the will of the owner, has historically been justified by the painter Gustave Courbet as destruction of a monument symbolizing the *war and conques*t. As such, vandalism was done as an expression of contempt, creativity, or both (Moore, 2006:1). In this context, the same author proposes that vandalism only makes sense in a culture that recognizes history and archaeology.

The term *vandal*, like other similar terms such as *barbarian, Berber and philistine*, was originally used as an ethnic slur referring to the vandals, who sacked Rome in 455 BC. But, unlike Berbers, vandals and Philistines, no longer exist as an identifiable ethnic group (Haeckel, 2006).

An example of official vandalism includes the return to power of the priest of Amun in Egypt after the religious innovations of Akhenaten were accompanied by desecration of the Pharoah's tomb and the ritual obliteration of his image from temple reliefs and inscriptions (Stahl, 2000:14).

During the French revolution (1794), Gregoire - the constitutional bishop of Blios - used the word *vandalisme* to describe some behavioural patterns followed by the republican army. Theron (1991:44) and Welch (1991:99) identify Gustave Courbert's attempt, during the 1871 Paris commune, to dismantle the Vendome

column, a symbol of the past Napoleon III's authoritarian empire, as the most celebrated event of vandalism.

In order to understand contemporary vandalism, it is important to define vandals as such.

3.4.2 The vandal

Black (2002a:99) describes vandals as criminals since they destroy property, waste time and money, and cause suffering to others which may even lead to death.

Although Van den Aardweg (1999:247; *cf.* 1.2) regards vandals as *usually* being male, younger than most delinquents, who come from less mobile homes and usually work in gangs, Sanders (2000:139) opines that there is no typical vandal. School vandals include good or bad learners, girls and boys, Whites and Blacks, as well as the rich and the poor. Van Jaarsveld (2008:178), concurrently, contends that although it has long been believed that violence occurs amongst individuals who are disadvantaged in comparison with the rest of society, this is no longer the case. Vandalism is also occurring among the economically, socially and politically well-off individuals. In agreeing with the latter, Nel (2006:19), however, posits that some populations (for example low-income groups) are still at greater risk of committing violence.

In using an ecosystemic approach, the mutual dependency of various systems in the learner's context is taken cognizance of. Within this framework, it must be recognised, firstly, that challenging behaviour such as vandalism at schools does not originate in the individual learner but is rather a product of such a learner's social interactions. Secondly, that challenging behaviour is caused by cyclical chains of actions and reactions between different participants, and, thirdly, that interventions need to acknowledge all the role players and systems within the learner's context (Saunderson & Oswald, 2009:147; *cf.* 2.2.1).

Sanders (2000:139; *cf.* 1.1) points out that vandals can be learners dissatisfied with their education, who take out their unhappiness on school buildings. Learners, as vandals, damage property because of, among others, boredom, anger, revenge, defiance and alliance or merely modelling what they see at home and in their communities, which leads them to use violence as a method of resolving issues. While acknowledging the fact that learners often regard various forms of violence as the only way to resolve conflict, Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009:43) contend that violence at schools is, in addition, brought along by educators who are unable to discipline learners effectively.

While most bullies openly defy and bully others during school hours, vandals often prefer to damage property anonymously, at night, over weekends or during school holidays (De Wet, 2010: 195).

Black (2002b:2) identifies the following types of vandals:

- vindictive learners who harbour revenge against an educator or other member of staff,
- malevolent learners who enjoy causing problems,
- learners driven by ideologies to draw attention to a specific problem or issue,
- bored learners who commit vandalism in search of excitement, and
- frustrated learners filled with anger because they feel that the school and community are hostile to them.

Van Petegen *et al.* (2008:452) show that numerous studies report a lack of motivation or decrease in positive school-related attitudes leading to an anti-school culture among, especially, secondary school learners. This decline has mostly been found to be attributed to psychological changes associated with puberty and the school environment.

Van Jaarsveld (2009:179) also identifies various other factors that may contribute to school violence, such as substance abuse, drug use or abuse, poor school performance, drug dealing, mental illnesses, joining a gang, being abused as a

child, poverty, stress, incompetent parents and media influences such as television, movies, books, computer games, music and the Internet. In referring to the recent incident in which a secondary school learner killed another with a sword at Nic Didericks High, Van der Westhuizen and Maree (2009:44) show that violence is often a measure taken by learners merely in attempt to get others to *take notice of them.*

3.4.3 Characteristics of vandals

Cohen (2002:130) maintains that those who vandalize or break into schools are typically young and male, acting in small groups. Supporting the fact that school vandals never operate alone, Houlan (2005:17) and Zeisel (2000:144) stress that school vandalism is mostly conducted by learners within the school that was vandalized.

According to Nel (2006:20), the different forms of vandalism share many forms of common underlying risk factors. Some include psychological and behavioural characteristics such as poor behavioural control, low self-esteem, and personality and conduct disorders, while others are related to experiences, such as lack of emotional bonding and support, early exposure to experiencing and/or witnessing violence at home, and family or personal histories marked by divorce or separation. Prinsloo and Neser (2007:52), concurrently, show that learners who are at prey of becoming vandals tend to have low self-esteem, are more prone to depression, experience higher levels of anxiety and, normally, exercise less self-constraint.

Vandals often come from poor socio-economic communities where parents are compelled to work long hours, leaving their children unattended, without the necessary supervision and care. The absence of the latter, together with the fact that many parents are lacking parental skills contributes, according to Bezuidenhout and Joubert (2008:60), to learners' becoming vandals.

Saunders and Oswald (2009:157) add characteristics such as learners giving in to peer pressure, experiencing language and cultural differences, as well as learning and reading problems and non-involvement in sport and other extra-mural activities. The research results of Prinsloo and Neser (2007:51) underscore the fact that acts of aggression are generally regarded as group behaviour as aggressors tend to be learners who prefer *to go along with the crowd.* Language and cultural differences, in addition, lead to learners feeling alienated, excluded and isolated. As a result, such learners never experience a sense of belonging, are not encouraged to take ownership of their own learning and behaviour and do not create a sense of pride in their schools. Learning and reading problems among learners, on the other hand, lead to their being frustrated as they experience their inability to cope and perform adequately.

In relation to the age group of school vandals, Cohen (2002:130) and Wilbert (2001:558) report that they are roughly between the ages of 12 and 15, although the greatest number of arrests made, thus far, include juveniles between the ages of 13 and 14 years. Those vandals involved in school-related arson are, to the contrary, as pointed out by Black (2002a:66), more likely to be much older.

Typical school vandals are characterized by the following: they perform poorly academically, may already have been truant, suspended or expelled from a school, have a poor understanding of the impact their action may have on others as they are more concerned with the consequences thereof on themselves. Offenders are, in addition, more likely to be emotionally disturbed than their peers, and are more critical of their classes, educators and schools in general (Black, 2002a:66).

It is important for educators to consider all the above-mentioned characteristics of vandals as educators do not always consider the holistic picture. They often do not take cognizance of their own influences on learners, as well as of the influence of classroom and school cultures, the way classrooms and schools are managed, as well as other related school factors when listing possible causes for

challenging behaviour among learners (Saunderson & Oswald, 2009:157). Neither do they consider and explore potential assets within a learner's social context when addressing learner behaviour.

3.4.4 Motivational factors behind vandalism

Since there are various plausible explanations to the violence that is occurring at schools around the globe, Van Jaarsveld (2008:178; *cf.* 1.3) points out that it is important not only to look at one explanation or blame it on one aspect, but rather look at it holistically. Nel (2006:21; *cf.* 1.2) similarly shows that vandalism, as a form of violence, is an extremely complex phenomenon that has its roots in the interaction of many factors - biological, social, cultural, economic and political. Therefore there is no single factor to explain why one person and not another behaves in such a manner, nor why one community will be torn apart by violence while a neighbouring community lives in peace.

Saunderson and Oswald (2009:155), in addition, point out that it is important to acknowledge that the different systems, of which children either form a direct or indirect part, present critical contributing factors and causes challenging behaviour. As a result, vandalism can only be understood properly if the dynamic interaction and interplay between systems and the multiple influences affecting children lives are fully comprehended.

According to Joubert (2008b:120), all crime can be explained by people's pursuit of self-interest. This argument simplifies the motives of youth misbehaviour, particularly against the background of diverse social problems. Prinsloo and Neser's (2009:51; *cf.* 1.3) research results, similarly, show that the reasons behind many acts of violence are predominantly of an egocentric nature. It was revealed that learners act violently due to aggressors' desire to show their dominance, for the fun of it or as retaliatory behaviour. Disturbing lacks of insight by aggressors, who show poorly developed consciences which make them prone to committing violence acts, were also revealed. In trying to explain such behaviour for self-interest, Zeicher and Liston (1996:xi) refer to the influence of

the freedom struggle in South Africa prior to 1994 on the lives of current learners as many of their parents have been part of this lengthy period characterized by political unrest and strong resistance to authority which has been communicated to them.

Joubert (2008b:120) mentions that crime is related to self-concept. The latter has social roots and is reflected in the psychological personality of the youth offender. Weeks (2009:5), correspondingly, shows that if a learners' self-image has been scarred, they will seek fulfilment of their needs in ways that may not always be acceptable or successful. As negative circumstances leave children vulnerable, Saunders and Oswald (2009:156) emphasize the need for educators to be aware of the fact that learners are often the victims of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, resulting in their having very low personal and academic self-concepts, poor self-confidence and self-image, as well as poor levels of motivation. Weeks (2009:5), in turn, emphasises the need for educators to genuinely listen, communicate and talk to learners in order to meet their psychological or emotional needs. The latter is important as Watson *et al.* (in Osher & Fleischman, 2005:84) argue that, when the *internal assets/psychological or emotional needs of learners* are nurtured, the following positive outcomes can be expected: learners are better able to control their own behaviour, are more capable of dealing with academic and social challenges, and are more skilled in terms of building and maintaining social relationships.

Learners also struggle with issues such as emotional instability and health problems, while having to deal with negative influences from their family, moral issues, cultural conflict and general negativity (Saunders & Oswald, 2009:156). When children are neglected or abused they feel humiliated, demeaned and unworthy and, consequently, develop low self-esteem and a rage against others (Joubert, 2008b:121). Such children care little what happens to them. Their feelings towards themselves are reflected upon others and thus they have a negative attitude towards others (the driving force behind their behaviour). They choose to be violent and to disrespect the rights and/or the property of others.

Sociological approaches also stress the importance of social factors as the causes of crime. Anti-social actions are, accordingly, not so much attributed to individual characteristics as to environmental conditions. It is, thus, assumed that crime is primarily a lower-class problem as it points to flaws within the social structure that increases the odds of a person within that social stratum resorting to illegal behaviour (Joubert, 2008a:98).

Berg and Scharf (2004:78) indicate that South Africa is pertinently characterized as a *high crime* society. Moore *et al.* (2003:253), moreover, refers to the widespread belief that vandalism at schools is caused by societal cultures which encourage, tolerate and demand violence. To clarify the latter, Nel (2006:20) stresses the fact that culture plays a key role as it sets the boundaries around what is acceptable behaviour and what is not. In South Africa, this phenomenon has become known, as pointed out by Van Jaarsveld (2008:178), as the *culture of violence* due to the heightened incidence of violence which individuals have come to accept and regard as a normal part of everyday life. With reference to the prevalence of crime and violent acts such as vandalism, Smith and Stones (2004:2001:162) opine that a country cannot be built on fear and mistrust.

Goldstein (2006:43) is of the opinion that observers may regard school vandalism and break-ins as pointless, particularly when offenders focus on destructing property that has nothing of value. Vandalism in this sense is referred to by Johnson (2005:17) as *nuisance break-ins,* as little serious damage is caused and nothing of value is taken. Because of its viciousness and apparent senselessness, people find vandalism particularly difficult to understand.

In this regard, Blauvelt (1999:221) shows that mindless and youthful exuberances normally only prompt relatively minor destructive acts. A learner can, for example, not resist marking his desk or seat with a penknife or scrawling poetry on the lavatory wall or door. To the same extent, Blauvelt (1999:221; *cf.* 1.2) opines that the young are usually only showing off by throwing stones at windows.

More serious acts of vandalism, to the contrary, are, as suggested by Cohen (2002:11), motivated by anger, boredom, catharsis, erosion of already damaged objects, and aesthetic factors. In addition, Goldstein (2006:54) outlines that fear, anxiety, hostility and revenge obviously account for, especially, many destructive, large-scale acts of vandalism. Rage at the world in general or at a school in particular may prompt the act. A dropout learner may, for instance, feel a keen sense of failure and blame his educators. Consequently, he/she breaks into the school at night and tears the place apart. Van Jaarsveld (2008:179), in addition, shows that learners are aiming at solving conflict and problems through violence in an attempt to reach goals at schools, as this has long been a core element in South African culture.

These forms of violence are referred to by Johnson (2005:17) as either *professional break-ins or malicious break-ins* during which expensive equipment is intentionally damaged significantly. Johnson (2005:54; *cf.* 3.4.2) emphasizes that most delinquent acts are carried out by groups of youths. Participation in vandalism, thus, assists in maintaining or enhancing a vandal's status among peers. This kind of status is believed to come with little risk since, in contrast to playing a game or fighting, there are no winners or losers.

Further motivational factors for vandalism include:

- acquisitive vandalism, committed to obtain property or money;
- tactical vandalism, to accomplish goals such as getting school cancelled;
- ideological vandalism, oriented toward a social or political protest against school rules;
- vindictive vandalism (such as setting fire to the principal's office after being punished), done to get revenge;
- play vandalism when youth intentionally damage property during the course of play; while
- malicious vandalism is used to express rage or frustration (Johnson, 2005:61).

3.5 THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF VANDALISM

Smith and Stones (2001:159) point out that, South African adolescents face significantly greater challenges than their counterparts in countries where society is more stable.

Violent acts such as vandalism are regarded by Prinsloo and Neser (2009:46) as being counterproductive and having the ability to frustrate scholastic institutions' educational and social goals. In this regard, Harber (2001:2) highlights that acts of vandalism often cause harm to innocent people. In providing examples of the latter, research conducted by Bach and & Louw, (2010:25) on the correlation between children's exposure to violence and the development of psychological problems such as depression indicate that learners from all ethnical groups are significantly exposed to violence. Depression (a mental health problem posing a severe threat to children's all over well-being) as a consequence of violent environments was, however, found to be remarkably higher among girls than boys.

Throughout South Africa, millions of rands are spent annually on repairing vandalized buildings, money which could have been used to decrease infra-structural backlogs or expand educational opportunities (DoE, 2000a).

Vandalism negatively affects not only individuals, but also the larger community. Stout (2000:2) explains that the police, fire and emergency services are directly affected as it increases their workload. Public facilities, such as parks and public rest rooms are vandalized to such an extent that they become unavailable or dangerous. Court systems are also affected by the strain of time-consuming hearings and trials which jeopardize a defendant's right to a fair and speedy trial (Cummins, 2003:88).

By merely joining groups of teenagers who are vandalizing property out of boredom or trying to and impress peers, a child can, as a consequence, end up having a police record for the rest of his/her life (Harber, 2001:2).

Despite the consequence of vandalism for vandals themselves and the economic losses caused by their acts, vandalism also brings along extreme negative consequences for others. As school vandalism in schools intensifies, educators, for example, also fear for their lives (News 24; *cf.* 1.2). As a result, educators feel unsafe, angry and negative towards all learners, which; in turn; leads to a lack of motivation to assist learners within the learning environment (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010:225&227). In support, Valley *et al.* (2002:87) opine that educators are experiencing a dangerous feeling of disempowerment, leading to a lower quality of education, increased absenteeism among educators and a total collapse of trust and communication between educators and learners (De Wet, 2010:199).

In collaborating on the above, Burton (2008:16) stresses that the non-physical forms of violence are often as serious as the physical ones, as they can have equally detrimental effects on young people, despite often being viewed as less important. The same author emphasizes that, learners are threatened with vandalism as a form of violence at schools, may experience a lack of concentration in classrooms, the inability to focus on their school work, while also undermining their ability to form healthy, positive relationships and bonding with educators and peers. Furthermore, threats of vandalism may contribute to increased truancy and dropout rates, both risk factors for later delinquency, as the threatened child is too afraid to attend school.

Since adolescents' are normally more vulnerable to the damaging effects of stressors in their environment, Bach and Louw (2010:26), they are exposed to increased chances of developing psychological problems such as depression and post-traumatic stress when confronted directly or indirectly by acts such as vandalism. The same authors (2010:25) are, however, optimistic that adolescents could be taught effective coping and problem-solving techniques in schools to help empower them against stressors they might encounter.

3.6 SUMMARY

This chapter presented a literature review on school vandalism. The latter was discussed within a theoretical ecosystemic framework, placing emphasis on the ecosystemic model and theory as outlined in chapter two. The different environmental systems children experience during their developmental years were argued by accentuating the family (*cf.* 3.2.1), community (*cf.* 3.2.2) and school as systems. The application of an ecosystemic theory, stressing the importance of collaboration by all educational role players, to school and community interventions (*cf.* 3.3) was also, addressed.

Focus was, lastly, placed on the historical background and origin of vandalism (*cf.* 3.4.1), the vandal (*cf.* 3.4.2), the characteristics of vandals (*cf.* 3.4.3), and motivational factors behind vandalism (*cf.* 3.4.4). The negative effects of vandalism (*cf.* 3.5) were also presented.

The literature study and the content analysis indicate that a combination of factors involving learners, educators, schools, parents, communities and the law cause learner vandalism. Prevention strategies should thus concentrate on all these aspects, otherwise they will be merely cosmetic and probably short-lived.

The next chapter presents the research design and methods used in this study.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The overall aim, to study school vandalism within an ecosystemic framework, was highlighted in chapter one (*cf.* 1.3). This applied research (Fouché & De Vos, 2009:105-106) aims at assisting role players in education to combat vandalism among learners in practice by providing knowledge development on this phenomenon and introducing the important parts of an ecosystemic programme.

The literature review, presented in chapter two, offered the ecosystemic framework for the empirical study, following a systematic process of collecting and logically analyzing information (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:3).

An ecosystemic anthropological perspective was followed as a model to gain knowledge on human behavior and to organize observations and reasoning, and to gain knowledge and understand reality (Delport & Fouché, 2009:261-262). This was aimed at enabling the researcher to draw conclusions and make suggestions regarding vandalism in terms of such a holistic approach (*cf.* 1.3). At a deeper philosophical level, a constructivist-interpretive paradigm was considered in the sense that reality was carefully constructed and interpreted. In addition, ways on how to solve this societal problem were aimed at, in accordance with transcendental pragmatism (Fleisch & Christie, 2004:95; *cf.* 1.6).

In view of the above, this chapter outlines the overall design of the research, the methodology followed and the instruments utilized to collect relevant data. Focus is also placed on the sampling, data analysis and interpretation strategies applied, as well as on validity and reliability issues.

4.2 ISSUES OF MEASUREMENT

Research is used to find a solution to a problem or to improve an existing solution. It helps the researcher to gain more knowledge on a research problem and come up with recommendations and conclusions. De Vos (2009:41) draws attention to the fact that scientific research involves the objective study of people – *inter alia,* their beliefs, behaviour and interaction - with the aim of gaining a valid understanding of them.

A thorough study of theoretical literature on the impact of vandalism at schools was conducted in order to demonstrate the underlying assumptions regarding school vandalism and to redefine the research questions (Delport & Fouché, 2009:263). The aim was to define vandalism, describe its causes and impact on the Department of Education, schools, educators, school governors and learners and to review the effect of vandalism on teaching and learning. Theory reviewed this way was used to guide the study in an explanatory way (before data collection) (Delport & Fouché, 2009:265). Intervention programme or strategies to control vandalism were derived from available data bases, such as Google, EBSCO-Host web and various sources such as the Internet, dissertations and journal articles.

A qualitative research within a constructivist-interpretive paradigm (*cf.* 1.6) was conducted to gather information on an ecosystemic programme for school vandalism, as the researcher needed to be guided by the information obtained from the participants (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:12; *cf.* 1.6). A qualitative research design was selected to describe and analyze the participants' individual and collective social actions, beliefs, thoughts and perceptions (*cf.* 1.6.1). In line with qualitative research design, the researcher endeavoured to develop a comprehensive understanding of school vandalism by reporting multiple perspectives, identifying the many factors involved in this social phenomenon by way of an ecosystemic approach placing emphasis on the social contents in

which it occurs, and generally sketching the larger picture that emerged (Creswell, 2009:174; *cf.* 1.2).

Within the framework of a qualitative research design a case study was conducted with the purpose of gaining insight into the perspectives and expectations of principals regarding school vandalism and how acts of vandalism in schools affect teaching and learning. This research strategy of inquiry was employed as the researcher endeavoured to obtain a more intensive examination of school vandalism as an anti-social behaviour and its deeper meaning within an ecosystemic model (Fouché & De Vos, 2009:106). This research design allowed the researcher to provide an in-depth description of a group of educators and learners within their day-to-day setting (bounded system) in order to produce insider perspectives (Mouton, 2004:148).

A case study strategy of inquiry was, furthermore, selected as research method since it allowed the researcher to explore vandalism as a contemporary human act in its real-life context by collecting detailed information over a sustained period of time (Creswell, 2009:13). This strategy was aimed at guiding the study in an explanatory manner (Delport & Fouché, 2009:265) and enabling the researcher to reach a holistic, deeper understanding of how participants interact with one another schools and how they make meaning of school vandalism (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:75). A case study was decided upon as it furthered the researcher's understanding about the nature, causes and extent of school vandalism in Sebokeng. The researcher's interest in this area was, however, secondary to his overall interest in school vandalism, both nationally and internationally for which he endeavoured to propose an ecosystemic programme as solution (Fouché, 2009:272).

After defining a specific focus for their studies, case study researchers typically spend an extended period of time on site with their research participants. This was extremely important for this research as the researcher wanted to involve the subjects as an integral part of his research design (Mouton, 2004:150) in

order to establish how they can be empowered to change their social conditions. Delport and De Vos (2009:54) as well as Douglas (2000:14) describe this process as *watching people in their own territory and interacting with them in their own language, and on their own terms*.

4.2.1 Design limitations

Although the research design followed allowed for active involvement and participation of the participants, which enhanced the chances of high construct validity, low refusal rates and participants taking ownership of the findings (Mouton, 2004:151) the following aspects have been identified as limitations of this study:

4.2.1.1 Limited geographical scope

The empirical research was limited to Sebokeng situated within the Sedibeng West Education District. The literature study focused mainly on South African literature since school vandalism is rife in South African schools. This is a limitation, since the findings will not be regarded as a general representation of school vandalism globally (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:76). Taking a smaller number of cases with a lower degree of control also affects the overall generalize-ability and possibility of strong causal and structural explanations in South Africa (Mouton, 2004:151).

4.2.1.2 Limited time

As the research had to be completed within a specific period, time to conduct the interviews was limited to the principals as participants.

4.3 SAMPLE DESIGN AND SAMPLING METHODS

As pointed out by Nieuwenhuis (2007b:79), sampling is a process used to select a portion of the population for a study. In line with this, the population will firstly be identified and then the sampling process will be discussed.

4.3.1 Population

The target population (n=118) consisted of principals, deputy principals, educators and learners from both primary and secondary schools in Sebokeng, as part of the Sedibeng West Education District 8 of the Gauteng Department of Education (*cf.* 1.6.2). This area consists of 36 secondary schools which are divided into 15 clusters.

Sebokeng, located to the south of Johannesburg, consists of a predominantly low-income population with high numbers of unemployment. In view of the fact that people's views on their personal surroundings and futures, as well as their emerging identities are influenced by their societal, political and economic context (Steyn *et al.,* 2010:174), Sebokeng was purposively selected on the basis of this area's potential to provide rich data needed for the study. The structural features present in this area, such as poverty, unemployment and poor education are, moreover, viewed by Joubert (2008a:98) as indirect causes of high crime rates among members of such a socially deprived area. The identification of the population was done in accordance with the qualitative research design as such a design is not restricted to the selection of participants, but also involves the setting, incidents, events and activities to be included for data collection (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:79).

The above allowed for researching vandalism in schools using an ecosystemic approach for which taking a holistic view is essential.

4.3.2 Sampling strategies

A selected sample (n=8) of four secondary schools and four primary schools were purposefully selected to assist the researcher in understanding the societal problem at hand (Mouton, 2004:151; Creswell, 2009:178). In accordance with the ecosystemic model, such a sample ensured a representative body of data on the views of a quantitative significant number of participants.

The researcher was given an opportunity and latitude by the respective School Governing Bodies and School Management Teams to observe the whole functionality of the schools, which included access to school registers for educators and class registers for learners' attendance (document analysis). This enabled the researcher to observe the processes of teaching and learning by visiting certain classes where educators felt comfortable in being observed; by looking at the structures of leadership and management of the eight schools; and by looking at the output of the learning and teaching processes. It also enabled the researcher to observe the educators and how they cope with the overflow of violent symptoms from society into their schools (Bester & Du Plessis, 2010:204).

4.4 DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION TECHNIQUES

It is first and foremost important to mention that this qualitative research aimed at not treating data collection and data analysis as two separate processes, but rather to see them as one ongoing, cyclical and interactive (non-linear) process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:81). Collected data was, thus, continuously analysed until it was saturated.

One of the positive aspects of using a case study method is that it enables the use of multiple sources and techniques in the data gathering process (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:76; *cf.* 1.6.3). Data was, accordingly, mainly collected by way of observations in the field and by way of interviews.

4.4.1 Observations

Participants were continuously observed by the researcher spending time in their natural setting and making field notes on the behavioural patterns and activities (what was seen and heard) in order to understand the assumptions, values and beliefs of the participants relating to the occurrence of vandalism as experienced from their perspective (Creswell, 2009:181). The researcher remained detached from the events observed and all process (McMillan & Schumacher, 2001:207) in

order to ensure confidentiality and trust (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:84) and exclude any manipulation of data (Fouché & De Vos, 2009:107; *cf.* 1.6.3).

Data collected through observations was continuously reflected upon, and analytic questions were posed while field notes, containing a chronological description of all events related to vandalism, were taken on a day-to-day basis (Creswell, 2009:84; Strydom, 2009:274) to capture the wide variety of ways in which people act and interact (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:179; *cf.* 2.2.1). Nieuwenhuis (2007:84) mentions that observations allow us to hear, see and begin to experience reality as participants do. To obtain the latter, field notes included comprehensive data on the participants themselves, the events, discussions and communication taking place, as well as feelings, attitudes and perceptions posed by the participants.

Data collected through observations was meticulously recorded by way of an observational protocol (Creswell, 2009:181). This included a single page with a dividing line down the middle to separate descriptive notes (portraits of the participants, communications taking place and a description of the physical setting, activities and events) from reflective notes (the researcher's personal thoughts on the emotions, problems, ideas and impressions). These notes were made after some demographic data about the time, place and date of the observation was recorded.

The findings were analyzed, conclusions were drawn and recommendations made to achieve the objectives of the research. An ecosystemic analysis of the data was employed to illustrate how elements of school systems interact with others to create school well-being. The analyzed data thus highlights what is both useful and challenging in promoting and sustaining good practice in developing a caring school ethos (Roffey, 2008:29). An ecosystemic model of analysis in this study proved useful in illustrating ways in which various elements within schools built on one another to create positive change (Roffey, 2008:36).

4.4.2 Interviews

As the aim of qualitative research is to see the world through the eyes of the participants, (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87; *cf.* 1.6.3), face-to-face interviews, consisting of semi-structured questions were held with the eight respective principals as their visions of their schools in honouring the importance and potential of their learners were regarded as being the driving force at schools (Roffey, 2008:32; *cf.* 3.2.3.1). Principals, as school leaders, were moreover chosen since they are the ones responsible for delivering effective and quality education (Naidu *et al.*, 2008:4). As school managers it is their duty to, *inter alia*, promote discipline, establish a positive culture and ethos, to create positive relationships and effectively manage resources, both human and physical (Naidu *et al.*, 2008:5).

During the semi-structured interviews participants were required to answer predetermined questions individually in order to define the line of inquiry (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:87) and to maintain control over the process (Creswell, 2009:179). The researcher, however, remained attentive to responses, rephrased answers and required clarifications whenever necessary to facilitate clear communication and understanding. Open-ended questions were posed so that the participants did not feel pressurized through the presumption of any specific answer at any stage.

The interviews each took between 45 and 75 minutes and were recorded on tape. Written notes were also taken especially to capture any non-verbal cues (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:92). Since the data needed indicated strong interconnections between different levels of the school system, this research followed an ecosystemic analysis thereof.

After completion of the data collecting process, the data was analysed and interpreted. The main reason for the latter is, as pointed out by Mouton (2004:108-109), to break the data into manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships and to synthesize it into larger coherent wholes (Creswell, 2009:183). The data was interpreted in order to relate the results and findings to

existing theoretical frameworks and to establish whether it supported or falsified the latter.

4.5 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY - CREDIBILITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS

When it comes to validity and reliability issues, qualitative researchers, being the research instrument themselves, prefer to refer to credibility and trustworthiness (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:80). Since credibility is one of the key criteria for trustworthiness, it is necessary to illustrate how the trustworthiness of this study was ensured.

A detailed case study protocol and database were set up for data collected through both observations and interviews. The transcripts were checked for any mistakes, the definition of codes were monitored by consistently comparing data with the codes and detailed descriptions of findings were conveyed (Creswell, 2009:191) as the value of this research lies in the particular description and themes developed in context of a specific site. Particularity, rather than generalize-ability is therefore the hallmark of this qualitative research (Creswell, 2009:193).

The aim of this study was not to generate exact, measurable findings, but rather to describe and analyse vandalism as an emerging reality. In line with this, crystallization of information was employed to enable the researcher to shift from seeing vandalism as a fixed, rigid, two-dimensional occurrence to allowing for an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations and angles of approach. Crystallization therefore provided a complex and deeper understanding of vandalism (Nieuwenhuis, 2007:81).

The emerging reality regarding an ecosystemic programme for school vandalism was, thus, not seen as some form of measuring. It rather emerged from the various data gathering techniques and data analyses employed, and represented the researcher's reinterpreted understanding of school vandalism. The findings, therefore, crystallized from the data obtained. This crystallized reality is, as

pointed out by Nieuwenhuis (2007:81), credible in so far as others will be able to see the same emerging patterns and this adds to the trustworthiness of the research.

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter dealt with the research design and methodology and addressed the issues of measurement (*cf.* 4.2). A description was provided on how the population was selected and the sample determined (*cf.* 4.3). Interviews (*cf.* 4.4.2) and field notes (*cf.* 4.4.1) as data collection methods were discussed, while an explanation was provided on the capturing, editing and analysis of the data. Focus was also placed on validity and reliability, or rather the credibility and trustworthiness of the study (*cf.* 4.5).

The next chapter concentrates on the final analysis and interpretation of the data collected.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, focus was placed on the research design and methodology used during the course of this study. As such, the sampling strategy, methods of data collection and method of data analysis were explained. The question regarding validity and reliability including issues of ethical consideration were, moreover, discussed.

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the findings according to the data obtained from the interviews and field notes. For clarification reasons, the findings are presented by way of tables followed by an explanation. The findings are interpreted, the limitations of the study are identified and recommendations are made.

5.2 DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

After the analysis of data, five interdependent categories emerged. These are the causes of school vandalism, the influences thereof, the challenges school violence present, the necessary strategies or programmes that need to be implemented, as well as the support principals need to combat school vandalism. The presence of each category led to the presence of the others. For example, if school vandalism is caused, then there are influences which present challenges and necessitate management strategies to be applied which, in turn, evoke the need to be supported in addressing such a problem.

The interdependence of the categories is demonstrated in figure 5.1.

Causes of school vandalism

Influences of school vandalism

The challenges presented by school vandalism

Strategies and/or programmes to be implemented

Support needed by principals
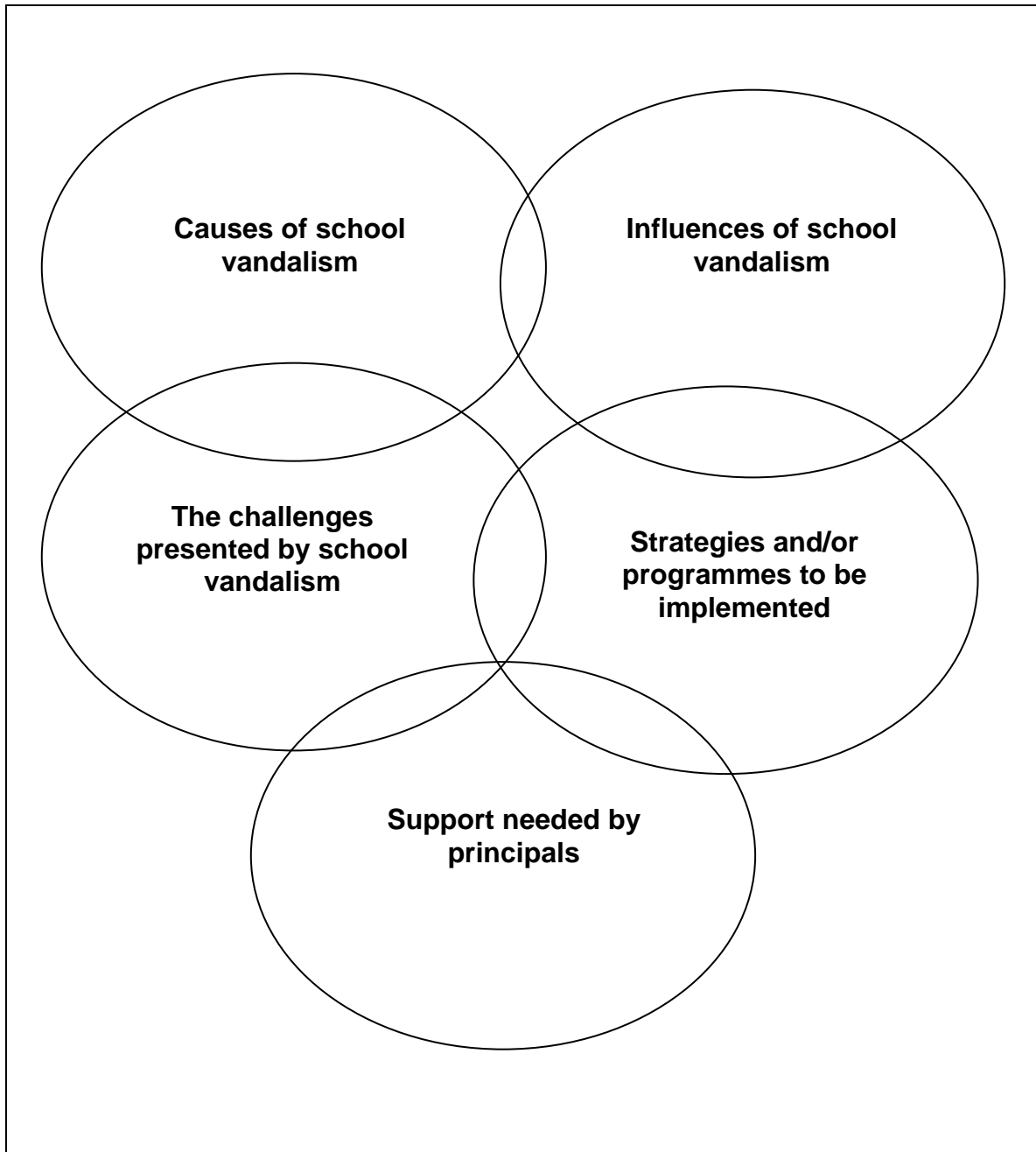
Figure 5.1: The interdependence of the categories that emerged after data
    analysis

The researcher referred to participants using numbers, for example *participant 1* and *participant 2*. Participants communicated what they felt comfortable with, without any coercion from the researcher. Clarity on privacy and confidentiality was stated in consent letters, *i.e* participants were told that their names would remain anonymous and confidential in this study.

All participants were ensured of their right to discontinue - often used when participants refuse to respond to a question (Burns, 2000:21). As mentioned above, participants have the right to privacy. When participants refused to respond to a question, thus being unwilling to disclose private information, the researcher respected their right to privacy by not forcing them to respond.

Table 5.1 presents a summary of the five categories that emerged from the transcribed, translated and coded interviews and field notes made from observations. The results of the study will be discussed and interpreted by addressing the research aims according to these categories and their properties.

Table 5.1: A summary of the five emerged categories

	Category 1	Category 2	Category 3	Category 4	Category 5
	Causes of school vandalism	Influences of school vandalism	Challenges of school vandalism	Strategies and/or programmes to be implemented	Support needed by principals
	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties
Interview 1	Night watch men lack proper training Non-existence of policy Lack of ownership by staff, learners, and the community Deteriorating of norms and values (ubuntu) in the society Poverty Few recreational activities Boredom	Parental guidance Poverty Environment	No transparency No respect to state property	Policy to be drafted by all stakeholders Monitoring of learners during lunch by educators and after school by the community Community Police Forum to be implemented (CPF)	Community support Parental support All role players
	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties
Interview 2	Naughtiness Inquisitiveness Arrogance Negligence	Truancy Poverty Drug abuse Hooligans / theft	Vandals are very young – no imprisonment Palisade fences are weak Many scrap yards in the community	Hiring of security – full time Upgrade human security Educate the society	Local counsellor Society support Local churches Collegial support Learners' support
	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties
Interview 3	Unemployment Obtain valuables to make money Community not trusting each other Syndicates Scrap-yards	Finances	Unarmed night watch men GDE to employ full-time security Security not responding quickly to incidents	Blow the whistle on perpetrators Transparency Employ Community Police Forums Police patrolling at night Involve SANCO, counsellors	Community support SGB support

	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties
Interview 4	Acts of criminality Perpetrators don't value the property of the State Break-up of families Frustration Anger	Peer-group pressure	Lack of ownership by both learners and the community Change of mindset Lack of security movement	Educate the people Mobilization of the community	Community support Police support (SAPS) Learners Educators
	Properties	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**
Interview 5	Lack of role-models Lack of ethics Theft Anger Lack of respect for what belongs to the State Disorder in the community Frustration Lack of morals, norms and values Poverty	Role models Education systems Culture Environment	Life orientation failing to cure the system Religion Monitoring of learners during break and lunch	Involvement of the community Interaction of community Organization within the school Adopt reverends corps, psychologists	Community support Parental support Professional assistance Support groups Educator support

	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties	Properties
Interview 6	Fun Anger Boredom Vandals not interested in school activities Money Frustration	Poverty Gangsters Ill discipline – behaviour Lack of role models	Repairing of damages Funds not available Security	Involvement of all role players Police patrol	Government (GDE) Community School Governing Body
	Properties	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**
Interview 7	Ill discipline of learners Unemployment Lack of alarm systems No electricity	Community do not trust each other Environment Community activities during weekends, e.g. churches, political organisations	Repairing of damages Removing of graffiti on the walls Educate both educators and learners	Involve all the role players Keep learners constructively busy after hours Involve parents in school decision making processes Draft a policy	Parents Police Social workers Psychologists Community
	Properties	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**
Interview 8	Learner behaviour Negative attitudes towards school property Anger Boredom	Environment Anger/frustration Community less concerned about state property	Educate the community Involve all the role players in school activities School vandalism be part of the curriculum	Involve parents and the community Adopt a cop system Install alarm systems Have workshops or seminars with learners	Parents Community Learners Other professionals
	Properties	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**	**Properties**
Field notes	Frustration Learners not coping with school work	Environment	Educate both learners and educators	Visit other schools without vandalism	Government Social workers

5.2.1 Findings based on research objective 1: Exploring the nature and extent of school vandalism in Sebokeng in order to gain insight into this phenomenon and to get acquainted with the current situation

While observing township schools, it became apparent that both primary and secondary schools, particularly in the Sebokeng area, are heavily targeted by vandalism. Vandalism has caused the state millions of rands, for removing or cleaning graffiti from school walls, repairing windows, doors, electric wires, toilet pipes and ceilings and purchasing laboratory equipment and computers.

Figure 1.8 School vandalism

School vandalism has, thus, indirectly contributed to ineffective teaching and learning at these schools, as learners do not have enough desks and chairs. Some learners share chairs while others use old tins to sit on. Educators find it difficult to control and manage such classes. During winter months it becomes more difficult to both learners and educators, because of very cold classes without windows, doors and electricity. Resulting from the latter, educators rather spend most of their time in the staffroom and leave learners unattended for the entire school day. Accordingly, learners do not perform well academically.

Due to school toilets not working because of copper pipes and water taps being broken or stolen, learners often leave schools early. Truancy by both learners

and educators, in addition, is rife, increasing the challenge to manage schools effectively.

5.2.2 Findings based on research objective 2: Describing the most important causes of acts of vandalism committed by learners in order to create a general picture of conditions and explain the reasons why school vandalism occurs

5.2.2.1 Category 1: The causes of school vandalism

Although most vandals do not have a clear motive for their acts, studies show that basic social problems and attitudes are at the root of the vandalism (*cf*. 3.4). Among the many explanations for vandalism are anger against society, boredom, drugs and alcohol abuse, disciplinary problems, personal problems and racial or political conflicts. The causes of school vandalism were further subcategorized according to their characteristics.

Table 5.2 presents the sub-categories and their properties that were identified. The sub-categories of this category are firstly outlined, after which the table is presented.

5.2.2.1.1 Social factors

Social factors are seen as acts that cause school vandalism and disrupt teaching and learning. Learners do not live in isolation, they learn morals, norms and values and ethics from society. A variation of acts experienced by the participants from both primary and secondary schools in this study with regard to social factors, includes disorder in the community, as well as a lack of family values. The participants indicated that the community does not value State property and, overall, lack an ownership mentality. One of the participants (*Participant* 1) responded that:

... *the break-up of family values leads to parents not valuing their parental responsibility to their children and behaving in a socially unacceptable manner.*

The participants also indicated that they experience problems with unemployment in the community as it results in school vandalism. It was pointed out by the participants that most vandals regard schools as targets, where they can easily take valuables. Computer centres were found to be the most popular sites for perpetrators in order to steal computers.

School toilets are also targeted with the aim of obtaining brass metal such as water taps, copper pipes and other electrical appliances to sell to neighbouring scrap yards. According to *participant* 7:

school vandalism is mostly performed by adults or parents of learners who have access to information regarding the existence of specific school property.

Participant 6 also identified the question of values, norms and morals as the main contributory factor leading to school vandalism. He claimed that:

People do not trust each other, they are afraid to blow the whistle on each other as they are scared of being killed.

5.2.2.1.2 Personal factors

Indicators identified under this subcategory include aspects such as having fun, arrogance, negligence, boredom, frustration, low self-esteem, naughtiness and inquisitiveness. *Participant* 8 responded as follows:

Whenever learners are caught writing graffiti on school walls, chairs or desks, they are reluctant to give reasons for their acts., but when they are faced with punishment, they provide reasons such as that they did it for the fun of it or because they are naughty.

Another factor causing school vandalism, as referred to by the participants, is frustration. It was indicated that learners are frustrated by the situations they experience at home or by the fact that they cannot cope with their school work, leading them to develop a low self-esteem. In this regard, *participant* 6 responded as follows:

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School vandalism is an act of violence. Vandalism conducted by frustrated learners is a cry for help. Learners are telling us that they are not coping. When people are frustrated they turn to express themselves through acts of anger. Africans belief that, in order to settle the scores, violence is necessary. In the older times people believed that violence could bring order, they believed that, in order to settle a score, pain had to be inflicted.

Participant 1, in addition, identified boredom as a main cause of school vandalism. He opined that a shortage of recreational activities at their school led to boredom among learners. Boredom in classes also led to learners starting to break school furniture, especially when left unattended by their educators. In line herewith, he stressed the importance of learners always being supervised by educators.

The participants, moreover, identified learner negligence and inquisitiveness as causes of school vandalism. *Participant* 7, for example, responded that:

Learners often want to conduct experiments in the science laboratory due to inquisitiveness, unaware of the fact that they are indeed vandalizing laboratory equipments.

According to *participant* 5:

... learners just do not show any respect for State property. Our children are very irresponsible.

5.2.2.1.3 Education system

With regard to the education system, the participants indicated the non-existence of policies on school vandalism. *Participant* 2 reacted as follows:

We talk with learners at the assembly about vandalism of school property, but we fail to maintain consistence because there is no policy documents in place. Educators also do not have knowledge about the concept of vandalism.

5.2.2.1.4 Security factors

According to the participants, the government *i.e.* Gauteng Department of Education is responsible for security at schools. Provision in most schools is, however, only made for one night watchman, guarding the entire school without a firearm for his protection. If schools need the service of another night watchman, the School Governing Body must take full responsibility for his/her appointment and remuneration. *Participant* 7 responded:

We do not choose the type of security fences for our schools; the government chooses it for us. We also need electric fences as school in towns.

With regard to alarm systems, *participant* 4 indicated:

Yes, we have installed an alarm system, but the problem is that security companies in township areas do not patrol our schools although we pay them every month. Even if there is a burglary taking place at schools, they do not respond.

5.2.2.1.5 Family factors

Unemployment and associated poverty was identified by the participants as the main family-related factor leading to learners becoming vandals. It was also stated that learners often participate in school vandalism only to enhance their status among their peers. In this regard *participant* 8 said:

Most family members in the community are not working. Children at an early age learn the art of stealing to survive. Valuables such as copper pipes, brass handles, water taps, photocopy machines, lawnmowers and computers are targeted by vandals. School vandalism is act of criminality.

5.2.2.1.6 Religious and political factors

Religion is also viewed as a major cause of school vandalism. According to *participant* 4:

Religion in education is out of control because of the Constitution of the country. We fail to control the behaviour of learners. The South African Schools Act is pronounced to assume that all learners are Christians. Teachers are now reluctant to discuss religious issues in the assembly. If people know about God, learners will be behaving. I belief we really need religious education to be taught especially in primary schools, because our children have lost morals and values.

Social factors	- Unemployment - Disorder in the community - Money - Lack of morals, norms and values (ubuntu) - Lack of role models in the community - Acts of criminality - Lack of ownership
Personal factors	- Arrogance - Negligence - Boredom - Frustration - Naughtiness - Inquisitiveness
Education system	- Non-existence of policy - Less interested in school activities - Few recreational activities
Security factors	- Night-watchmen lack proper training - Theft - Scrapyards
Family factors	Poverty
Religious and political factors	Diversity of cultures (religion)

Table 5.2: Sub-categories regarding the causes of school vandalism

5.2.3 Findings based on research objective 3: Reviewing the effect of vandalism on teaching and learning

5.2.3.1 Category 2: The influences of school vandalism

School vandalism is influenced by various factors including peer group pressure, the environment, poverty, ill-discipline, gangsters and unemployment. It is necessary, in this regard, to distinguish between the causes and the influence of school vandalism. Although these two concepts are intertwined, the one depends on the other. They are, nevertheless, different concepts with different underlying factors. The properties of category 2: The influences of school vandalism were further sub-categorized according to their characteristics. Table 5.3 presents the sub-categories and their properties that were identified. The sub-categories of this category are forthwith referred to, followed by the table.

5.2.3.1.1 Social factors

The environments from which learners come are not conducive for them to their optimally developing and becoming responsible adults. Some learners grow up without parents and are brought up by grandparents; as a result they lack proper guidance. Gangsters become their role models. Unemployment and poverty have also contributed to the occurrence of school vandalism. Learners join gangsters because they need to belong to and be protected by these groups. To become a member of a group and be accepted, learners are required to use drugs or work with their *role models* in selling drugs. In this regard, *Participant* 7 responded as follows:

We understand the situations of our learners, but the problem is that we are not their role models, maybe because we do not drive fancy cars. Also our principals', deputy principals' and educators; lifestyles are conservative. Learners are looking for material things, like clothes and cars rather than putting focus on their future. They join gangsters for conformity.

5.2.3.1.2 Family factors

Poverty is associated with mental problems. People from the lower socio-economic classes encounter more severe stressors than people from the middle classes because they have fewer resources and coping mechanisms at their disposal. Many children from poor homes are not exposed to the situations that promote the development of coping skills required to meet the demands of an increasingly complex society (Duraiappah, 2009:106-109). Participants stated that poverty influences school vandalism. *Participant* 5 said:

Learners in our area, most of their parents are unemployed. Because of poverty learners are faced with reality in everyday of life, they come to school with empty stomachs. In this way they cannot cope in the classroom, and they become frustrated. As a result they vandalise school property to escape their anger.

Category 2: The influence of school vandalism	
Sub categories	**Properties**
Social factors	- Unemployment - Money - Environment - Gangsterism - Drug abuse - Peer pressure
Family factors	- Poverty - Home background

Table 5.3: The influences of school vandalism – sub-categories

5.2.3.2 Category 3: The challenges of school vandalism

School vandalism, occurring on a daily basis, is a *virus* which needs serious attention. Since educators have little information about school vandalism, they are not aware of it. School vandalism presents a challenge to the State, Educational District Offices and schools, as well as to all role players. In line with

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this, the participants agreed that school vandalism is a challenge that needs to be taken very seriously by all role players in education. *Participant* 4 responded as follows:

Our educators are aware of vandalism that takes place at school; they are aware of graffiti on school buildings as they cross or walk around. I do not think they are aware that is part of vandalism.

Table 5.4 provides the sub-categories of the challenges brought about by school vandalism, which include security, school and social factors.

5.2.3.2.1 Security factors

The participants indicated that they regard security issues as the most challenging factor schools are confronted with as it lies beyond their control. The State normally takes care of security-related issues while it is only the schools' responsibility to maintain them. *Participant* 5 indicated that:

Palisade fences are very weak; vandals break it very easily. There are lots of holes at the back. We have tried several times to close those holes, but still after a day or so the holes are more than yesterday.

Nearly all the participants (95%) pointed out that their schools have installed alarm systems in their administration blocks and computer centres. *Participant* 3 responded:

We do report incidences of vandalism immediately, but sometimes it is very difficult for the police to put these perpetrators behind bars, as they are very young. The police do take forensic finger prints but nothing happen.

5.2.3.2.2 School factors

All the schools that formed part of the sample of this study are zero fee schools. As such, the learners do not pay school fees. Government provides them with finances to run the school. Each school has a committee responsible for

compiling a school budget. Each committee has prioritized funds to reach the needs of the school. The maintenance committees are, however, challenged annually to repair damages and maintain school buildings. *Participant* 5:

As long as we fail to combat vandalism in our schools, our schools will remain like this …we have irresponsible learners and communities. Every year we repair fences, broken windows, broken doors, door and window handles, toilet seats and pipes. This money should be utilized for other things that will develop teachers and learners, but instead we have to purchase the same items every year. This is not good for the school.

Another challenge, with which schools are faced, as pointed out by the participants, is the monitoring of learners during break, lunch and sports days. The latter is important as the participants indicated that vandalism mostly transpires during the times when learners are not closely monitored. In responding to the latter, *participant* 7 said:

Monitoring of learners during break, lunch and sports' days is a good exercise, but this can be applicable in primary schools but not in secondary schools, because during lunch they smoke dagga and meet with friends. During sports' days they can be very dangerous to educators.

5.2.3.2.3 Social factors

Certain social factors are also observed as a challenge in controlling vandalism at schools. Most of the participants specified that they would love to get rid of or close scrap yards in the community since most of the stolen items from schools are sold to them by vandals or perpetrators. *Participant* 1 replied:

The first problem is that there are no cooperation between the community and the school. The community must learn to work closer with schools. If parents are called for parent meetings to discuss important issues, very few parents attend the meetings. The community must learn not to buy stolen goods. We

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understand that most parents are unemployed and that stolen goods are cheaper
but they must NOT buy it. They should rather report such vandals to the police.

Category 3: The challenges presented by school vandalism	
Sub categories	Properties
Security factors	• Weak palisade fences • Security not responding quickly • Employ full-time security officers • No finger prints of vandals
School factors	• Repairing of damages • Lack of finance • Monitoring learners during break, lunch and on sports days
Social factor	• Scrap yards to be taken out of the community

Table 5.4: Sub-categories regarding the challenges which school
vandalism presents

5.2.4 Findings based on research objective 4: Recommending intervention
strategies, suitable to control vandalism at South African schools

5.2.4.1 Category 4: Strategies or programmes to be implemented

To address school vandalism effectively, school administrators need to develop a
comprehensive plan that includes multiple prevention approaches which address
each facet of the problem. Rather than focusing exclusively on the symptoms of
the problem, at least some of the approaches need to address the school's
environment, school patrol issues, creating a joint school community, security
measures, electronic protective devices, the media, the role of the police and
attitudes toward violence which may underline learner vandalism, including
school norms and policies that tolerate or even facilitate binge drinking.
(Theron,1991:6).

5.2.4.1.1 Church and youth organizations

According to Dust (1992:6), the presentation of various programmes by church and youth organizations, among others, may assist in keeping the youth constructively busy after school hours, during weekends and holidays as there are still too many lonely and frustrated youths idling about. The same author recommends that recreational programmes for youth must emphasize adventure, exciting relationship opportunities, parental skills, communication skills, drug awareness, employment support, crisis intervention, sculpture workshops and other forms of life-skills development.

The community should become actively involved in youth programmes that provide young people with constructive alternatives to vandalism and enable them to take pride in their neighbourhoods instead of destroying them. These could include neighbourhood beautification programmes, community camping trips, basketball teams and soccer teams. Youth organizations can also develop counselling centres or anti-vandalism campaigns at schools or assist other youth groups such as the Girls Scouts, Boys Scouts, Campfire Girls, Boys Clubs, Big Brother/Big Sister or other youth-oriented community service organizations (Geason & Wilson, 2000:17). Participant 7 reacted as follows:

"… why not? The school can adopt a reverent or church to work closer with them. Invite him to assemblies to give the word of God and motivate learners and staff spiritually.

5.2.4.1.2 Patrols

Schools need to hire members of the community to patrol the vicinity of schools from 23:00 to 3:00. Learners, as part of a programme called *Cal Aggie Hosts* can assist in confronting loudness and vandalism, and in confiscating liquor and beer bottles and other types of drugs from learners. District police officers can be used to educate and induct the community in policies and procedures, and in conflict recognition and management. The police show their members' training

videotapes and training manuals describing assignments can be distributed. While patrolling, community members can work in pairs, serving as the eyes and ears of the police. When vandalism is observed, the police can be called to take appropriate action (Epstein & Peter, 2000:1). Commenting on the latter, *participant* 2 said:

E*mploying or hiring of the community can be the solution, a long-term solution but the problem, I ask myself, can a school afford to pay all these people? Unless the parents assist with money, schools alone cannot afford it alone.*

5.2.4.1.3 Joint school-community

Smith and Laycock (2000:11) posit that incidents of vandalism also occur within the community, therefore the community as a whole should be mobilized in order to address the problem. The use of school facilities for community recreation activates can be beneficial: firstly, because adults are present at these building which would otherwise be abandoned, and secondly, when both learners and adults use school facilities for the purpose of recreation, they tend to view the school as their own and act in such a way as to protect the facilities. Participant 6 opined that:

We need to make sure that we teach everybody that the school cannot operate alone. Therefore we need the involvement of the community. Make them) aware that the school belongs to the community.

5.2.4.1.4 Electronic protective devices

One of the most popular methods to protect schools today is through the use of electronic protective devices. While it is usually not economical for the entire school, devices for corridors, administrative offices, stairwells, ground floors and rooms with expensive equipment (type-writers, calculators, computers, audio- and visual equipment) should, at least, be afforded adequate protection (Sandler, 2001:559). However, *participant* 8 stated:

"…we only install alarm systems in the administration office to save costs; electronic surveillance camera is too expensive.

5.2.4.1.5 Parents

According to Cummins (2003:2), the key solution to combating vandalism lies with parents. In addition, Bloemhof (1990:6) mentions that parents should educate their children in taking responsibility for their communities. Fiscus (2002:6) believes that if there are no values in the family, then children will follow anyone. It is, thus, not only the responsibility of schools, but also of parents to instill positive values in learners. *Participant* 5 pointed out that:

Learners are vulnerable, they cannot make proper decisions. It is the responsibility of parents to guide and mould their children.

5.2.4.1.6 The role of the police and the legal system

Stout (2002:5) recommends co-operation between schools and the police in order to combat vandalism at schools. The police should regularly patrol schools and adjoining neighbourhoods. Visible policing is essential in order to combat crimes such as vandalism. The police also need to be involved in open days, and even help to coach sports teams (Harber, 2001:267). *Participant* 8 responded as follows:

The community police forum must take rounds after school hours and during weekends and must make them available to the community in order to warn perpetrators.

5.2.4.2 Category 5: Support needed by principals

School vandalism is a serious problem as it places a heavy burden on education budgets and can cause teaching and learning to collapse. Learners, moreover, have the right to be taught in neat, clean school buildings and grounds, to play and develop their full potential. It is, therefore important to find ways of preventing school vandalism (Stout, 2002:11). School vandalism is a problem

that needs the attention of all role players. Principals cannot solve the problem of school vandalism alone, they need support from the learners, parents, community, police, educators, as well as support from other professionals, such as psychologists, social workers and learning support personnel.

5.2.4.2.1 Parental support

Parental support is the primary source of support needed by school principals. Parents should respond when called to discuss the difficult behaviour of their child(ren). Since events transpiring in the family may be the cause, a positive response by parents may help principals and educators to understand the causes of the difficult behaviour of the child, as well as the family background. *Participant* 6 stated:

Parents that normally respond to school invitations are parents of children that are not troublesome at school, those that are mostly needed; they normally do not come to school.

5.2.4.2.2 Collegial support

Principals rely on educators to be knowledgeable about learner behavioural disorders. Whenever learners enrol at another school, the previous school should send a learner profile to the new school. Such a profile will then be read and kept at school by the educators. Visser (2007:51) describes collegial support as *consultative support to continuing staff as colleagues to supply the best available knowledge to pedagogical practices*.

Foundation phase educators also need the support from educators who teach intermediate and senior phase classes. Perhaps these educators can help with advice on how to manage difficult behaviour among learners. School-based support teams can also be called in for assistance. With reference to school-based support teams, *participant* 1 responded:

The school-based support team will talk with learners and write letters inviting concerned parents to school, but parents make the task of the committee difficult by not attending such meetings.

5.2.4.2.3 Police support

Schools can apply an *adopt a cop* strategy to work in closer alliance with the police. Police officers can be invited to the school to address issues related to drugs, theft, rape and vandalism of school properties. *Participant* 6:

Every term the police are invited to try and talk with these learners about drugs and school vandalism. Educators sometimes find learners smoking dagga, the police usually come maybe during break and take them to the police station, during lunch you will see them smiling and boosting to others in the school yard. It is a very frustrated situation, because no one will tell what happened.

5.2.4.2.4 Other professionals

The participants indicated that they believe that they can obtain support in managing school vandalism from other professionals. Each district office has psychologists who are deployed at primary or secondary schools. Professionals such as psychologists and social workers must collaborate with School-based Support Teams in order to solve the problem of ill-discipline learners. In this regard, *participant* 2 pointed out that:

… learners with social problems, ill-discipline and behavioural difficulties are referred to the professionals, but because their parents show no interest, learners do not finish their treatment.

5.2.4.2.5 The government

The participants stressed the necessity that the Department of Education should hire at least two trained security guards with guns per school to protect themselves as well as school properties. It was also stated that the Department

of Education should provide guidelines on how to manage learners that cause vandalism at schools. *Participant* 8 confirmed the latter by responding as forth:

I do not know if this is a policy or what, because I know few schools with two security guards paid by the State, maybe it depends on the size of the school, I really don't know.

5.3 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the verbatim provision of the responses of the principals regarding their experiences in school vandalism. The five interdependent categories that emerged from the data analysis, namely the causes and influences of school vandalism, the challenges presented by such violent acts, strategies to be implemented and the support needed by principals to address this societal-problem, were reviewed.

The findings were argued in line with the four research objectives stated in chapter 1 to which the different categories were aligned to.

The next chapter contains the summaries, conclusions and recommendation of this study.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents a summary of the previous chapters, after which the research findings are discussed. Flowing from the latter, specific recommendations are made. Limitations, experienced during the course of the study, are thereupon outlined, while themes for future research are identified. The chapter ends this report by presenting short concluding remarks.

6.2 SUMMARY

The nature and scope of the study were outlined in Chapter 1. Background information on the prevalence of vandalism in South African schools was presented, which leads to the statement of the research problem. In line with this, the research aims and objectives were highlighted, employing an ecosystemic approach. Within the parameters of this approach, the research methodology, incorporating the research paradigm, design, sampling methods, as well as the data collection, analysing and interpretation strategies, were addressed. Focus was, moreover, placed on important ethical issues, the feasibility and possible contributions of the study, as well as the contents of the chapters to follow.

The purpose of Chapter 2 was to provide a theoretical framework of an ecosystemic model, theory and way of thinking which could be used as background information against which acts of vandalism in schools could be researched.

In order to redefine the research questions, Chapter 3 consisted of an in-depth review of literature on vandalism at schools. By demonstrating the social

contents and the underlying assumptions regarding school vandalism, the latter was defined and its causes, impact and effect on teaching and learning in South Africa were discussed with the aim of guiding the study in an explanatory way.

Using Bronfenbrenner's ecosystemic model of child development enabled the researcher to examine the multiple effects and interrelatedness of vandalism, holistically, in school environments. The family, community and school as environmental systems children experience during their development were, accordingly, addressed by employing a systems way of thinking.

After applying an ecosystemic theory to school and community interventions, Chapter 3 discussed the historical background and origin of vandalism, the vandal and the characteristics of vandals, specific motivational factors behind vandalism, as well as the negative effects thereof. Following the latter, the causes of vandalism and possible prevention strategies were identified.

Chapter 4, on the other hand, dealt with the research design and methodology, as well as the issues of measurement. A description was provided of how the population was selected and the sample determined. Interviews and field notes as data collection methods were discussed, while an explanation was provided on the capturing, editing and analysis of the data. Focus was also placed on validity and reliability, or rather the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

Flowing from the above, Chapter 5 comprised of the responses obtained from the participants followed by a discussion of the findings, according to the data obtained from the interviews and field notes. An interpretation of the findings was provided, recommendations were made and specific limitations of the study *were, in addition, identified.*

By following an ecosystemic anthropological perspective, the researcher was enabled to, holistically, draw conclusions and make suggestions regarding vandalism in South African, which will forthwith be outlined.

6.3 FINDINGS

- This study has found that the causes of school vandalism, experienced at both primary and secondary schools, include a high rate of unemployment among parents; anger; boredom; a lack of role models; a lack of respect for what belongs to the State; disorder in the community; broken family ties; deteriorating morals, norms and values; poverty; few recreational activities and frustration (*cf.* Table 5.2; *cf.* 5.2.2).

- Table 5.3 (*cf.* 5.2.3) provided the influences of school vandalism that were discovered and subcategorized into social and family factors. It became evident that school environments are not conducive to teaching and learning and that learners' home background, where parents do not work, influenced their learning negatively, as such parents are unable to care for them. The result is that learners are sent to school hungry, with no school uniforms and without paying school fees. Poverty was found to contribute to the fact that children join gangs and become involved in drug abuse.

- Table 5.4 (*cf.* 5.2.4) presented the challenges of school vandalism that were subcategorized into security, school and social factors. Schools with only one security officer employed by the Department of Education, was found to be likely to be vandalized. Fences at such schools were also found not to be up to standard, as they were full of holes. Although most schools have installed alarm systems, it was reported that they are ineffective, due to the response rate of security companies as well as the police. Schools were also found not to be in a financial position to repair damages caused by learners, because of insufficient finances or budgets. Another challenge presented to schools was found to be community scrap yards that are eager to buy any property from vandals.

- Category 4 (*cf.* 5.2.5), portrayed the strategies or programmes that were found to be implemented by principals in order to combat school vandalism. Despite some principals endeavouring to call parents to school in order to

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obtain their cooperation, parents were reluctant and vandalism continued. The police also fail to patrol schools during the night. Most alarm systems are installed in administration offices and computer centres, leaving classrooms unprotected. Most of the schools did not have a policy regarding school vandalism. Learners are not informed on changing dispositions and on the disadvantage of vandalism. The issue of professionalism is recognized, but fails because of parents' lack to intentionally cooperating with schools due to unwillingness, depression or financial stress.

- In order to combat school vandalism, principals indicated that they desperately need the support of parents, colleagues, the Department of Education and other professionals, such as the police, social workers, psychologists and learning support professionals.

Although principals believe that the identified support can help them to manage learners and to take care of school property after school hours, they still experience problems to obtain the assistance of such role players. They experience parents as unwilling to cooperate. Principals especially experience difficulty getting hold of the parents of learners with behavioural difficulties. Despite phone calls and formal invitational letters, such parents can either not be reached at all or never come to school.

Another difficulty principals experience is the existence of many taverns in their community having a negative influence on learners. Even if parents try to discipline their children at home, the environment they are brought up in is found to be more influential on molding children's lives. After trying to get the cooperation of the community, the principals report that it was difficult, as community members do not trust one another. They are, for example, afraid to report school vandalism, because of fear of being killed.

The principals indicated that educators can help one another in managing learner behaviour at schools. Despite the latter, schools are still experiencing incidents of vandalism including the writing of graffiti on classroom walls, desks and chairs

with pens, the breaking of windows by playing soccer in classrooms and the breaking of door handles. Although educators write letters to the parents of such learners informing them about their children's misconduct, the parents never respond and fail to pay the damages. In this regard, educators do not exactly know how to help one another.

Despite the existence of committees such as Support Based School Teams and Learner Representative Councils, it was found that they are not functional. Although aware of professionals, such as police officers, psychologists, social workers and learning support staff, principals indicated that they do not know the proper channels of meeting with them and attaining their cooperation.

6.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations are discussed with reference to the findings of the study and their application in practice.

- In establishing an ecosystemic programme with regard to school vandalism, it must be recognized that acts of violence are not isolated problems, but rather linked to community factors, the school climate, organization and environment as well. In order to effectively deal with school vandalism, the wider social context and how learners interact in their social setting must, thus, be taken cognizance of. It is, moreover, essential to identify the factors within learners that promote acts of vandalism and aggression, while also examining the school climate and environment needs which may contribute to disorder and vandalism. The latter should, additionally, be regarded as a public health problem that has significant psychological implications for all involved.

- For support with regard to school vandalism, the Gauteng Department of Education could introduce learning support specialists who will be responsible for designing ways of supporting educators with regard to school vandalism. Learning support specialists could also establish communication links between schools and other sectors, such as social workers employed at

police stations and psychologists employed at local clinics, so that they can work together to design ways of supporting principals and other staff members.

- Schools should, on the other hand, also form a School-based Support Team that can take responsibility for learners who commit vandalism. The team should include parents in order to ensure their collaboration. Concerned educators can then refer learners to such a team and together they may come up with a solution for learners with difficult behaviours. A learning support specialist should arrange and conduct workshops to train members of the team on how to manage school vandalism *per se.* The team can compile a policy document on school vandalism of which parents should be informed about. Such a policy document should state measures, such as detention, that will be taken against learners for their intolerant behaviours. Educators should, in addition, compile classroom rules with learners, while the consequences of breaking such rules should be stipulated in order for schools to become less tolerant towards learner behaviour associated with acts of school vandalism.

- To draw up a policy on school vandalism, the governing body of the school can consult The Alternative to School Vandalism, a document compiled by the Department of National Education. This document provides guidance on how to draw up a policy on disciplinary measures at schools.

- Learners should be informed by means of information sessions and seminars/workshops on changing dispositions and on the disadvantages of school vandalism.

- Visits to other schools, especially those without vandalism, can be organized for learners so that they can see and witness tidiness and experience a school climate in which learners take pride in their school.

- Learners must be given more responsibilities; they should be involved in schools' decision-making and governance processes in order to guide them in taking ownership of schools and learning processes.

- Since a culture of silence may destroy schools, role players must be encouraged to report any undesired behaviour in schools and in the community.

- Schools must implement merit and demerit systems, not only to punish offenders, but especially to encourage positive learner behaviour.

- Regular meetings with community members on school vandalism should be held in order to share ideas and discuss possible solutions. Collaboration with community professionals, such as police officers to patrol schools at night, over weekends and during holidays should constantly be aimed at.

- Moreover, awareness must be created in respect of how vandalism adversely affects those who are exposed to it. In light of limited financial means to acquire extra security officials, alarm systems and additional insurance to safeguard schools as well as hiring professional mental health care workers to assist those negative affected, it is recommended that parents and other community members need to be encouraged and taught how to create support groups within their neighbourhoods, and especially in their schools, to help support educators and learners who are most vulnerable. Since not all potentially dangerous objects can be banned from schools, – needed objects such as scissors, pencils and cutlery can also be turned into dangerous objects – focus should be shifted from the objects to school discipline, access control, the use of existing safety measures, the adoption of unique policies and procedures, the creation of positive relationships between all role players as well as to affordable security measures with the aim of establishing an integrated program to prevent vandalism in schools.

6.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study lies in the fact that it was only conducted at Sebokeng which is a small township in the South West Part of Gauteng. There is, thus, a need for a broader study, which should target a larger population of the Gauteng. Such a study could provide more reliable and valid data on the principals', educators', learners' and parents' understanding of including all within an inclusive education system.

Interviews were conducted during school hours, because principals had to attend several meetings after 12:00 at the district office. Principals failed to keep appointments because of meetings, leading to the necessity to reschedule appointments over and again. Since most interviews were then conducted during breaks, the noise of learners was disturbing. Most participants were, in addition, unwilling and/or uncomfortable about being tape-recorded, leading to responses being minimal.

With regards to the limitations of the findings of this study, it must be recognized that there is a lack concerning its generalize-ability to schools from other geographic regions. There may be possibly significant differences in the levels of vandalism experienced between rural regions, such as the one where this study was conducted, and urban areas in South Africa. Family and community influences, as predictors leading to vandalism at school may also pose substantially different intervening variables from those experienced in this study.

6.6 RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER STUDY

Possible research procedures that this study could not cover are recommended for further study. They include:

- Research with the parents of both primary and secondary schools on school vandalism and how they can assist schools in combating vandalism

- Research on how the parents feel when called to school to discuss their children's' ill-disciplined behaviour

- Research with School Management Teams on what the school can do to support the principals in managing school vandalism. The support needs of both primary and secondary schools in managing school vandalism. There is a need, on comparable bases, to investigate the understanding of school vandalism by learners, educators and parents. Such a study could shed more light on the nature and extent of school vandalism at South African schools, and enlighten the nation on the successes of communities in implementing inclusive education effectively. There is also a need to investigate the way in which the Gauteng Department of Education can cascade the knowledge on school vandalism to parents and community members so that parents can have a clear understanding of school vandalism.

6.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

This research reflects the support needed by principals in managing school vandalism. The section of the study comprising a literature review created a theoretical framework within which the research questions were outlined. A qualitative research design was used. Data on school vandalism and support needs of principals was collected through interviews and observations. Data was recorded for verification and reliability. Tables were used to represent data.

The findings highlighted that principals need total support from parents, educators, the police and other learning support professionals, as well as the Department of Education in order to create safe schools where all learners and educators can learn and teach in safe environments without being intimidated by school vandals.

Schools should not be allowed to deviate from their primarily role to ensure that effective learning takes place, in order for children to become socially and

intellectually prepared to become responsible adults who actively participate in, and make a positive contribution to, the South African society and its economy.

It is hoped that this research will contribute to the debate and research on school vandalism by South African learners, parents, community and educators' through the understanding of the theory and philosophy of school vandalism.

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